Culture fitment-based hiring and gender inclusion in Indian organizations

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Women's march into senior leadership positions in organizations has been over the years far from smooth in most cases. Past studies suggest that women leaders are evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts, even when they behave in exactly similar manner (Agars, 2004; Eagly et al., 1992). Previous research indicates that biases in hiring and promotion processes contributes to the enduring gender inequities. (Giberson et al., 2005; Jackson et al., 2007; McKinsey Report, 2016; 2019; 2020). There is a dangerous implicit assumption that identifying the criteria for leadership positions, which is usually done by a group of senior managers (mostly male), may lead to a gender-based criteria for subsequent assessment processes. Including a significant or equal proportion of women into the sample from which the criteria are elicited might lead to a very different set of emerging attributes, closer to transformational leadership attributes (Metcalfe & Beverly; Bradford, 2010). Review of many research papers reveal that even though women are moving into management roles more readily and more importantly seem to possess that style of leadership which is closely aligned to transformational leadership, they are still not advancing to senior positions at the same rate as their male colleagues, even though at times they are also recruited in similar numbers.

Although, India's female labor force participation rate has increased to 37%, it is still low when compared to other countries in the world and a majority of women work in the informal sector (Fortune 2020). With global leaders addressing the widening gender gaps in companies, latest statistics from NSE shows that out of 2041 listed companies, only 100 has women as CEOs and Managing Directors. (Economic Times, 2023). India has progressed in appointing women on company boards and women now account for 17.6% of directorships in the NIFTY -500 companies. Although the number of women director ships is increasing, the pace of new appointments has faltered with just an aggregate 1% increase over the last three years (Economic Times, 2023). Again, a study done by the CFA Institute and CFA Society, India, reveals that within financial services companies, women represent 21.7% of employees and 15.9% of key management personnel. 18.7% of board seats in India are now held by women (Egon Zehnder, 2023). India has climbed eight places in the Annual gender gap report of 2023 and is ranked 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity, from 135 last year. But, according to recent survey (Hindu, 2023), this improved statistic, closing 64.3 % of the overall gender gap, is hardly a cause for cheer. It is important to note that BFSI registers a significant growth in terms of women hires - from 18000 women hires in 2022, this has moved to 31000 women hires in 2023. However, for men, these numbers were at 32000 in 2022 which moved up to 56000 in 2023 (Deccan Chronicle, 2023), the rate of increase remaining higher for men. Even on the global front, although for the past eight years, the proportion of women hired has been steadily increasing by about 1% per year, this trend shows a clear reversal starting in 2022, bringing the 2023 rates back to the 2021 levels (World Economic Forum, 2023).

McKinsey report of 2019 and 2021 had highlighted the need for companies to focus earlier on in the pipeline to fix the 'broken rung' to make real progress. Again, the McKinsey reports, (2020, 2021,2022) has stressed on the need to focus on diversity and inclusion to enable companies to function better.Again, there is ample evidence that diverse and inclusive companies are likely to make better, bolder decisions - a critical capability even in the pandemic crisis (McKinsey Report, 2020). The study conducted by Spencer Stuart and Kin-centric in 2021 had identified 'investment in diversity and inclusion' as well as 'growing attention to culture and employee listening' as top themes for 2021 and 2022. In fact, according to them, evolving the culture and prevailing mindsets is critical to becoming a more inclusive organization (Spencer Stuart, 2022). In a recent Spencer Stuart study, only 42% of 5000 employees report positive inclusion experiences (Spencer Stuart survey, 2023). Again, in the Spencer Stuart LinkedIn poll, 53% of respondents said modeling inclusive behaviors is the most important thing to create an inclusive workplace and the first step, according to majority executives would be to reflect on how they show up as leaders and how others experience the current culture. In fact, a recent survey has revealed that in the time of Great recession from 2007 to 2009, firms rated high on inclusivity by groups, usually at a disadvantage, were four times more successful than those where environments were not inclusive (HR World, Economic Times, 2023).

"When you look at the workplace, there is a gender bias even in the way we start a search for leadership roles, selection process, then the way we assist women. Organizations need to put in extra effort for diversity and gender inclusion" (Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, chairperson of Biocon, ET, 2021). In terms of women fit to lead, banking has bench strength, says Naina Lal Kidwai, former group General Manager and Country Head, HSBC, India. None of the top 10 companies on the Fortune India 500 list are headed by women (Fortune, 2020). Between 2012 and 2020, India has seen an 8.6% increase in the number of women on boards, with women holding 17% of board positions in 2020 (Egon Zehnder Global Board Diversity Tracker, 2020). "There is progress in gender diversity on the boards, but the job is still not done. The ideal percentage of women on board that India should aim for will at least be 25%. Also, the narrative needs to shift from counting the numbers to making the numbers count." (Kathuria - Egon Zehnder, 2020). .

A recent report suggests that bias in the hiring and promotion process contributes to the enduring gender inequities in the workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2016). Previous literature has highlighted that individuals that identify themselves as more masculine tend to be more biased in hiring decisions (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Rice & Barth, 2016). Previous research has also determined that having a gender balance on hiring committees is helpful for battling the preferences for men in the workplace (Paola et al., 2010). Thoughtful and inclusive hiring is a huge advantage for any organization. The opportunity to discriminate is greatest at the points of hire as disappointed job applicants are unlikely to challenge adverse decisions (Peterson & Saporta, 2004). Decision making in hiring is embedded in the problem-solving process and its many stages (Davidson & Sternberg, 2003; Guss et al., 2010). In the narrow sense, decision making is understood as the ability to select one of the several alternatives and act accordingly (Guss, 2004).

The fact that researchers even study decision-making processes suggests that decision making can be controlled, that it is boundedly rational, and that people can learn to be more efficient and effective decision makers (Lipshitz et al., 2006). Arriving at a decision requires the decision maker to weigh the risks and benefits of various options and derive a decision that compares potential losses against potential gains (Tversky et al., 1992). Numerous factors, including the availability of choices, the extent of the decision

maker's accountability, relationships among stakeholders (e.g., who is affected by the decision) recognition of familiar patterns, and how people construct the narrative (i.e., explain a situation to themselves), are all consciously or unconsciously considered while making a decision (Angie et al., 2011; Lipshitz et al., 2006; Weber & Morris, 2010). Apart from this, as mentioned earlier in the survey by Spencer Stuart (2023), cultural context shapes the degree to which these additional factors affect the decisions made, whether or not a person acknowledges that culture plays a role in decision making (Glazer, 2014).

Ovretveit (2014) defines context as all factors that are not part of a quality improvement intervention itself and various authors have developed taxonomies, theoretical and conceptual frameworks to delineate key elements of context that influence the success of quality improvement initiatives. Typical aspects of context highlighted in such frameworks include leadership, organizational culture, teamwork, resources, organizational characteristics, and various external environmental factors. In this study, the preliminary findings have helped to eliminate various contextual factors, imparting priority to organizational culture as the backdrop for research around gender inclusion. Context theorizing in management research can enhance its market orientation which not only makes study findings more accessible to managers, but, is also important for future theory building (Bamberger, 2008; Dubin, 1976). Context can also be defined as the situational setting in which workplace phenomenon occur (Cappelli & Sherer, 1991).

By focusing on the content of theories on leaders and gender, much of the research and analysis fails to consider the contextual variation in these stereotypes (Haslam, 2001; Oaks et al., 1994; Perry et al.,1994). Most of the research on women leadership positions is done by interviewing women in leadership positions and notby studying or interviewing their surroundings (Nikkila, 2017). It is important to note here that, as cultures change, the perceptions of gender roles and leadership changes as well (Snaebjornsson et al., 2015). Culture's expectations of leader behavior are the most accurate predictors of leadership styles as they have a direct influence on leader conduct (Minelgaite et al., 2015).

Culture forms a relevant facet of the internal social contextual factors in an organization. Many have debated the definition of culture (Triandis,1996). Schein (1992), defines culture of a group as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. Most agree with Kluckohn's (1951) definition that culture is an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling and behaviour that constitutes a distinctive human group. Culture can be defined as the "learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols and traditions that are common to a group of people" (Northouse, 2013). Implicit to all perspectives of cultural studies is that culture shapes the values and attitudes that affect people's perceptions, including human phenomenon like leadership (Ayman et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day 1997; Liu et al., 2012). Connerley & Pederson (2005) proposed a more integrated definition of culture. They considered it to be a complex (multidimensional and multilevel) and dynamic phenomenon consisting of both visible and invisible characteristics that may influence leadership. These categories of culture include demographic characteristics (place of residence, physical gender), status characteristics (economic and educational variables), ethnographic characteristics (nationality, ethnicity, language) and affiliations. People who differ from one another onthese categories can "experience the world in different ways whether those differences are based on internal differences, external differences in the way they are treated by others

or a combination of the two" (Connerley & Pedersen, 2005, p.4).

Organizational culture can be defined as the basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be, that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and their overt behavior (Schein, 1996). Artifacts, espoused values and basic assumptions and values are the three levels of organizational culture according to Schein. It is the key to organizational excellence and the function of leadership is the creation and management of culture (Schein 1992). It is a set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Organizational culture refers to a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations. This system of shared meaning is, a set of key characteristics that the organization values. (Pareek et al., 2003). Also, organizational culture may influence how much employees identify with their organization (Schrodt, 2002).

People's implicit theories of management and gender are not only descriptive, but also powerfully prescriptive (Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 2001). They seem to be guiding how we act as well as our expectations on how others should act. These stereotypes have the potential to substantially impact the way women and men are treated in their workplaces. These researched upon implicit theories have the potential to affect women's perceived suitability for management roles which arise from a perceived lack of fit (Heilman, 1983; Kent & Moss, 1994) and expectations of failure. Culture fit can be defined as the individual's attitudes, values and beliefs being in line with the core values and culture of an organization. Culture fit is predetermined box that employers, companies or hiring teams have that they expect candidates and future employees to fit into (Fontes, 2022). The concept of person-organization fit (Brown, 1996) can be traced to Schneider's attraction- selection-attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider, 1987), which suggests that people and organizations are attracted to one another based on their similarity. Although interviewers' perception of P-O fit may be based on many applicant attributes (demographics or personality), one important aspect of both individuals and organizations that can be compared directly and meaningfully is values (Chatman, 1989,1991; Schein, 1990). Values are enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end state is preferable to its opposite, therefore guiding individuals' attitudes, judgements, and behaviors (Chatman,1989,1991; Rokeach, 1973). At a practical level, ignoring culture and the surrounding dynamics can create problems (Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007), in the development of leaders of tomorrow. Culturally inclusive research has many benefits, including expanding on theories, increasing the range of variables, unconfounding variables and understanding the context in which behavior occurs (Trinadis & Brislin, 1984).

Most organizations use the interview as the primary tool for selecting new employees (Harris, 1989). Almost all organizations use the interview when selecting new employees, and it is widely believed that the interviewers' evaluation of applicants are crucial determinants of organizations' hiring decisions (Dipboye et al., 1994; McDaniel et al., 1994). Although theory suggests that interviewers' subjective P-O fit assessments should affect their selection decisions, little empirical research has examined the role of fit perception in organizational hiring decisions (Cable & Judge, 1997). Theoretically individuals are more attracted to others who fit because of reduced cognitive dissonance, improved communication, and increased predictability in social interactions (Festinger, 1954; Swann, 1984; Tsui & O' Reilly, 1989).

Although scholars often hypothesize that cultural similarities between employers and job candidates matter for employer's decisions (Lamont, 1992), systemic empirical research on the role of culture in hiring is virtually non- existent (Huffcut, 2011; Stainback et al., 2010).

It is necessary for organizations to focus not only on diversity, but also provide an environment that fosters parity among men and women. Diversity does not equal inclusion (McKinsey Report, 2020). Inclusion is defined as the psychological experience of feeling accepted and being treated as an insider in the workplace, while being able to retain one's unique identity (Pelled et al., 1999; Shore et al., 2011). Inclusion involves managing the dichotomy between affirming individual identities and integrating different groups (Dobusch, 2014). Assimilation of all groups or emphasizing on sameness may lead to undesirable outcomes, quite contrary to the objectives of inclusion (Mahadevan, 2012). Gender inclusivity is not limited to initiatives for increasing percentage of women in the organization or to provide secure work environment to women employees. It is a far more "complex multi-dimensional transformation journey" involving multiple stakeholders (Ravichandar, Business Standard, 2009). Even when looking at how companies are navigating the Covid pandemic, "companies that already see inclusion and diversity (I&D) as a strength are likely to leverage it to bounce back quicker and they will use this time to boost representation and inclusion to strengthen performance and organizational health (McKinsey Report, 2020).

Thoughtful and inclusive hiring is a huge advantage for any organization. The opportunity to discriminate is greatest at the points of hire as disappointed job applicants are unlikely to challenge adverse decisions (Peterson & Saporta, 2004). Majority of managers surveyed worldwide considers culture fit to be one of the top priorities in hiring, but most organizations do culture fitment badly (Rivera, 2020). Thus, there is a need to track the effect of fit through the stages of the hiring process ending with the job offer (Brown, 2000). Combating some of the deep rooted and embedded organizational assumptions requires a combination of formal and informal practices and the need to be reflexive and recursive (Kalev, 2009) which would work to inform choices made in selection, allocation of work, extent of supervision and promotions, affecting inclusion of women in the workplace (Anderson et al., 2005; Shin, 2013). Previous studies have pointed out the need for future research to focus on culture in organizations to facilitate inclusion interventions. (Vohra & Chari, 2015).

Besides, preliminary insights gathered through a small study conducted (the details mentioned further down the study) have brought to light variations in the perspectives of hiring managers on culture fitment, ie., level of significance associated to culture fitment as an evaluation criterion during hiring processes. Although, in the small study conducted, along with culture fitment, competency and leadership traits were also highlighted as popular evaluation criteria in hiring processes, significant variations were found in the ratings each of the respondents allocated to 'culture fitment' in the evaluation processes. These variations in perspectives on culture fitment brought to light during the preliminary phase of this research has been instrumental in directing this study towards further in- depth exploration and understanding of the exact role of culture fitment in hiring decisions. As previous research indicates the opportunity to discriminate to be greatest at the point of hire (Peterson & Saporta, 2004) and given how expensive hiring is, a deeper understanding of the various elements that influence these hiring decisions (culture fit), will go a long way to ensure that these organizations save both time and money by finding the right people for the right roles. Consequently, this study will also help to extend the existing literature and add value in two areas. First, it

will contribute to the literature by enhancing the understanding on how managers conceptualize culture fit during hiring processes. Secondly, it will aid in better understanding the reasons for variations in the levels of priority managers allocate to culture fit during hiring processes.

The clues to inclusion are found in understanding the culture (Kopelman et al., 1990). This study explores culture fitment hiring processes and their role in shaping gender inclusion in organizations. During the preliminary research conducted, although culture fitment, competency, leadership traits were all cited as significant evaluation criteria, major inconsistencies were revealed in the ratings given by the respondents for culture fitment as an evaluation criterion. Although all the respondents categorically cited culture fit as a significant evaluation criterion, there was considerable variation in the level of priority each of them allocated to culture fit. How this inconsistency would impact the hiring processes and shape gender inclusion is explored in this study. Newsline (2008) had highlighted the need for viewing gender inclusion as a business imperative and not just a CSR activity, for which serious work still needs to be done. As mentioned earlier, there is ample evidence that there are inequities in the recruitment (Gaucher et al., 2011), selection (Schmader, Whitehead & Wysocki, 2007), evaluation (Eagly et al.,1992) and promotion of women. Previous studies state that we tend to choose candidates who fit the corporate culture, which may produce biases against women (Giberson et al., 2005; Jackson et al., 2007). By understanding the role of culture fit in hiring processes, this study will throw further light on how to bridge the prevalent 'broken rung' in the pipe line and help to create understanding on what contributes to promoting inclusive culture fitment-based hiring. Overall, this research will add validity to the culture fit construct by understanding how managers conceptualize culture fit as well as the role and importance this construct has in real organizational contexts, especially in hiring processes.

Preliminary Study

To further refine my focus areas, a small study was conducted, the findings of which have also contributed to formulating and refining my research questions.

Taking into consideration the delicate nature of the problem of the study, I had decided to conduct individual interviews, as they would provide an opportunity for a detailed investigation of respondent perspectives. Insights gathered from this small study has also helped in developing the interview protocol later. Open questions were asked to HR and Talent acquisition heads of organizations in the BFSI sector as well as D& I consultants. All the respondents were within the age group of 30-50 with at least 10 years of experience in the corporate sector. The rationale for choosing BFSI was the fact that it is the primary driver of the nation's economy, with good diversity rates (36% as per CNBC report of 2020), a multitude of stakeholders, different generations, multiple functions, skillsets and thus ensures the prevalence of multiple perspectives under a single roof. Again, D& I firms were chosen with the expectation of gathering insights and perspectives on gender inclusion.

The open- ended questions asked to the participants came out with value adding insights.
Insights gathered from these interviews revealed that unconscious bias has a significant impact on hiring processes in organizations. The prevalence of bias was unanimously agreed upon and each respondent had

his/her own experience to narrate. Again, women were at the receiving end of such unconscious biases more than men. Lack of senior management support was unanimously cited as a major factor responsible for preventing the HR and senior managers from adopting better, more stringent, and less subjective initiatives to curb the prevalence of such biases. Culture fitment, competency and leadership traits were cited as common evaluation criteria for assessing candidates during interviews in the organizations. However, significant variations were found in the ratings each of the respondents allocated to 'culture fitment' as an evaluation criterion. The need to promote inclusion in organizations was highlighted by majority respondents. The need for organizational interventions to enhance inclusion in organizations was also emphasized by few of the respondents.

All these preliminary insights helped in framing the Statement of Research Problem for this study. The prevalence of the 'broken rung' in the pipeline, the implicit biases limiting the efforts to attain diversity, the discourse slowly shifting to inclusion, the prevalence of fault lines in managing the issues around gender inclusion, the knowledge that culture has a role in shaping gender inclusive organizations have all prompted to bring together into this study the constructs - culture fit, hiring and gender inclusion. This study aims to explore and understand the role of culture fitment in hiring processes in organizations and how it shapes gender inclusion. This would help to understand how managers conceptualise culture fit as well as the role and importance this construct has, especially in hiring processes. Such a study will also throw light on how to bridge the prevalent 'broken rung' in the pipe line and help to create an understanding on what contributes to promoting inclusive culture fitment-based hiring.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The Literature Review done provides a macro view of previous studies on women leadership, gender bias, organizational culture, culture fit, hiring and inclusion. The studies pertaining to women leadership and gender bias have contributed to building up the context of my study. This is followed by literature reviewed on organizational culture and culture fit in organizations. The theory based on which the cultural aspect would be captured and the cultural elements incorporated into this study, have been elaborated further in the literature review. The research works that have provided valuable insights for my study has been mentioned in a more detailed fashion. This also provides a picture of the current developments in the above areas of study.

2.1 Women Leadership and Gender Bias

Women can provide unique insights into the consumer behavior of customers and offer differentially beneficial perspectives (female) on client relations and overall business directions and practices than the mainstream (male) thinking (Bilimoria, 2000). Harnessing these advantages to the maximum would entail promoting a leadership development culture for women at all organizational levels and this would require a mind-shift at all levels in the organization (Bilimoria et al., 2015). Leadership development needs to be unique and different for women, tailored to meet their specific developmental needs existing simultaneously at both individual as well as organizational levels. There is a need to advocate for individual and organizational culture shifts that would support the themes of promoting women and in framing policies and procedures that would address the underlying issues (Bilimoria et al., 2008). The Role Congruity Theory was proposed to explain the sparse representation of women in leadership roles in organizations creating the 'pipeline problem' (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This study does not explore interventions and subcultural and cultural variations in the definitions of gender roles and leadership roles. With the help of this role congruity theory as well as the relevance of contextual and individual variations to these principles, researchers would be able to anticipate whether gender prejudice is likely to happen in the selection, evaluation, and promotion of people for senior roles in organizations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Both these studies have given less focus to culture and its role in bridging the prevalent gap in the pipeline.

Diversity is the 'varied perspectives and approaches to work that the members of different identity groups bring' (Ely & Thomas, 1996). It is also defined as the 'mixture of attributes within a workforce that in significant ways affect how people think, feel and behave at work, and their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction or progress in the organization' (Thomas & Benedick, 2013). While demographic diversity may be a visible lead indicator, diversity of thought is seen as an end game (Deloitte, 2011). The contributions of female leaders have been affirmed by the findings of numerous studies (Turner, 2012; Kezar 2014; Helgesen & Johnson, 2010; Gerzema & Antonio,2013) which argue for organizations to proactively pursue the participation of women in organizational leadership. Women who assume positions of broader

responsibility and influence within an organization, can help to increase organization-wide awareness of the value of diverse viewpoints, which is well documented in literature (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Williams, 2013; Woolley et al., 2010). However, noted that women's career paths tend to take the form of a spiral rather than a straight line of progression (Helgesen & Johnson, 2010) These women aspiring to senior roles face a litany of behavioral and attitudinal barriers in many organizational settings (Ely & Rhode, 2010).

Increasingly, research is showing that while explicit goals for diversity may be set, implicit biases may often limit the ability to achieve those goals (Macan & Merritt, 2011). In institutions where the structures, systems, environment, traditions, and interactions are created and sustained primarily by men, the culture that develops tends to be defined and understood in terms that reflect male norms (Ayman and Korabik, 2010; Helgesen and Johnson, 2010; O'Neil and Denke, 2016). Cognitive association of maleness and leadership challenges women's' advancement whether that association is held subconsciously or overtly (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). These cultural dynamics can create challenges for women who aspire to advance to senior roles, including the problem of wage inequities, lack of supportive workplace priorities, policies and reward structures (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014) and second generation bias embedded in stereotypes or organizational practices (Ibarra et al., 2013).The challenges faced by women in leadership cannot be targeted in isolation; rather, the first step is to recognize that women encounter barriers at all three levels, that micro and macro barriers impact women's ability to see themselves as leaders as well as others' ability to consider them for leadership roles (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Gorman and Kmec (2009) in their study focusing on the increasing disadvantage model, confirms that female mobility disadvantage is greater at higher organizational levels in the case of internal promotions, but not in the case of external hires. This contradicts the study done by Peterson and Saporta (2004), which states that the opportunity to discriminate is greatest at the point of hire, because disappointed job applicants are unlikely to challenge the adverse decisions. This gap needs to be further explored. Again, the study by Gorman and Kmec (2009), has refrained from exploring how the increasing disadvantage pattern varies with organizational characteristics, a prominent one being the gender traditionalism of organizational culture. Bilimoria et al. (2008), in their study, builds the case for why leadership development needs to be unique and different for women, tailored to meet their specific developmental needs. Although the study highlights the need to promote a leadership development culture for women at all organizational levels, the study does not address the organizational procedures, policies that could effectively address the underlying issues. Even the most progressive modern organizations have been created by and for men, and thus tend to have systems, policies, norms, and structures that favor the male life experience (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). Joshi and Roh (2009), in their study have examined the role of context in work team diversity research. Although contextual factors at multiple levels, including industry, occupation and team have been taken into consideration here, aspects of organizational context such as culture, climate and leadership have not been considered and warrants closer scrutiny in future research.

2.2 Organizational Culture and Culture fit

Culturally inclusive research has many benefits, including expanding on theories, increasing the range of

variables, unconfounding variables and understanding the context in which behavior occurs (Triandis & Brislin, 1984). Culture is an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling and behavior that constitutes a distinctive human group (Kluckhohn, 1951). Consisting of the unwritten rules of the social game, it is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede et al., 2010). The notion of organizational culture has been significant in the study of organizational behavior (Barley et al., 1988; O'Reily et al., 1991) over the past few decades. It is important to study the organizational culture as it has implications on the work attitudes and behavior of people (O' Reilly et al., 1991).

The increasing diversity in today's workforce means that to be effective, leaders need to develop a multi-cultural perspective and an understanding of the points of view of those who differ from themselves (Connerley & Pederson, 2005). Because leaders' and subordinates' gender or culture influences their frame of reference, these factors affect how leaders' behaviors are described and evaluated (Ayman, 1993). Previous research has shown that recruiters do attempt to evaluate applicant fit during the employment interview and this perception of fit affects subsequent selection decisions (Cable & Judge, 1997). Cultural background has been shown to shape many aspects of social and work orientation (Erez & Gati, 2004; Fulkerson & Tucker, 1999) and could influence interviewer ratings.

Despite disagreements over some elements of definition and measurement, researchers seem to agree that culture may be an important factor in determining how well an individual fits into the organizational context (Kilmann et al., 1986; Schein, 1985; Rousseau, 1990). Culture Fit can refer to the fit between the candidate skills and job requirements or to the fit between the person and the organization (Charman, 1991; Dawis and Lofquist, 1984; Herbert and Deresky, 1987; Rynes and Gerhart, 1990; Schneider, 1987). It is appropriate to select based on the fit between the candidate and the organizational values and culture, a tendency that seems to be increasing in organizations (Bowen, Ledford and Nathan, 1991; Bretz, Rynes and Gerhart, 1993; Dawis and Lofquist, 1984, Rynes and Gerhart, 1990). Person-Organization fit is defined as the congruence between patterns of organizational values and patterns of individual values, defined as what an individual values in an organization, such as being team oriented or innovative (Chatman, 1989). Values are a fundamental element in most definitions of organizational culture (Barley, Meyer and Gash, 1988).

Snaebjornsson et al., (2015), explores how perceived leader behavior and gendered behavior relate to national culture and actual leader behavior. This study confirms the need to include both gender and culture into leadership style research and highlights the need to have a longitudinal approach to leadership studies but fails to examine the underlying issues hampering the promotion of effective leadership potential. Culture's expectations of leader behavior are the most accurate predictors of leadership style as they have a direct influence on leader conduct (Dorfmal et al., 2012). The dynamics related to either culture or gender (stereotypes and schemas, ingroup – outgroup interactions, role expectations, power, and status differentials), can have an important impact on many aspects of leadership (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Leadership is not universal; rather it can vary as a direct function of either gender or culture (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Thus, after examining the concepts like women leadership, bias, culture and culture fit, this review highlights the need for further research to be done to better understand the role of cultural norms

and values in the leadership process and highlights a need for further research to be done to explore how the relation between leadership and outcomes are affected by group diversity for which culture and gender need to be the significant variables incorporated into theory building (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Moving ahead, literature review had suggested that employment interview might be a means to assess and hire for P-O fit (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Their study had also asked for future research to pursue additional construct definition and validation of P-O fit. However, P-O fit had not been considered in the context of the employment interview in any of the nine comprehensive literature reviews of interview research (Harris, 1989). Although interviewers most often mentioned job-related courses, experiences and general applicant characteristics (attractiveness) when responding to open ended questions about their subjective fit evaluations (Bretz et al., 1993), the study by Judge and Ferris suggests that it may be possible to improve interviewers' P- O fit judgements by structuring interviews around organizational cultures (rather than specific jobs) and by assessing applicants' personal characteristics that are relevant to the fit criterion (Judge & Ferris, 1992).

O Reilly et al. (1991) in their study had examined person-culture fit and its implications for work attitudes and behavior and the results have demonstrated that person-organizational culture fit is related to commitment, satisfaction, and turnover. Although these results suggest that person-organization fit may provide meaningful insights into individuals' adjustments to organizations (Holland, 1985; Louis, 1980), the impact of person-organizational fit on inclusion remains unexplored. Again, Chatman (1991), in her study explores how person-organizational fit is established and maintained and its consequences on organizational settings by examining the selection and socialization processes in public accounting firms. While the study emphasizes how organizations affect people, how people are influencing the organizations have not been closely examined here (Snyder,1983; Chatman, 1989). Also, the study recommends future research on person-organization fit to be more explicitly interactional. Adkins et al. (1994) examined work values congruence between applicants and organizations and found that values congruence did not affect the interviewers' subjective P-O fit perceptions and that work values and judgements of applicant fit seemed to have minimal impact on decisions to retain the applicant, especially at the early stages of selection processes. However, Cable & Judge (1997), in their study suggests that interviewer's subjective person-organization fit assessments do have large effects on their hiring recommendations relative to competing applicant characteristics and that the interviewers hiring recommendations directly affect organization's hiring decisions (e.g., job offers). The gap between these two studies needs to be explored further. Besides, there is no multi stakeholder perspective here on P-O fit. Also, the study fails to investigate the larger scenario after hiring. This study has suggested future research to continue examining P-O fit perceptions and interviewers' perceptions of applicants' characteristics as this is what most interviewers and their organizations rely on for their hiring and selection decisions.

Both gender and culture do make a difference when it comes to leadership in organizations (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). This study by Ayman and Korabik (2010), fails to examine the effects of gender and culture and recommends this for future research as it has the potential to change the definition of what constitutes leadership and what is considered to be effective leadership. The study limits itself to discussing how dynamics relating to either culture or gender (stereotypes, schemas, role expectations, power and status differentials) can have an impact on many aspects of leadership recommending further research as helpful for attaining a more inclusive conceptualization of leadership. A grounded theory study conducted by

Longman et al. (2018) examined the role of organizational culture and organizational fit in the leadership aspirations and experiences of women in faith-based colleges and universities in the US with the conclusion that personal congruity with the organization or institution is an important consideration for women employees who are serving or aspiring to senior roles in organizations and they do have an impact on their leadership aspirations and opportunities for professional mobility. However, a more diverse participant group would have likely affected these findings differently due to intersectionality of race, gender and culture. This limitation highlights the scope for further related research and exploration of other contexts.

Although scholars often hypothesize that cultural similarities between employers and job candidates matter for employer's decisions (Lamont,1992), systemic empirical research on the role of culture in hiring is virtually non-existent (Huffcuff, 2011; Stainback et al., 2010, as cited in Rivera, 2012). Applicants' displays of cultural signals and lifestyle markers are typically marked as non-productive and thus has received minimal empirical attention (Tilly & Tilly,1998). Although culture and structure are mutually reinforcing (Sewell, 1992), and structural positions, including gender and race strongly influences the content of ones' cultural toolkit (Swidler, 1986), considerable variation in values, experience and behavior exists within demographic groups (Lamont & Small,2008) and these need to be explore further. Perceived similarity is thought to be more important than actual similarity in the decision to hire (Graves &Powell, 1995) and a critical source of perceived similarity is shared culture (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Although Rivera (2012), in her study investigates the often suggested but empirically unexamined hypothesis that cultural similarities between employers and job candidates matter for employer's hiring decisions, the study does not examine the degree to which gatekeepers use cultural similarities after the point of hire, ie; in promotion and compensation decisions. Also, emphasizing cultural similarities may result in greater sex or race biases than was the case in Rivera's study, when culture and demography are more tightly coupled (Turco, 2010). This warrants further study.

Organizational sociologists working on 'cultural matching' in hiring processes show that embodied cultural processes (habitus) play a strong role in hiring in elite investment banks, law firms and management consulting firms, where employers tend to hire based on an affective sense of commonality or 'homophily' with a job candidate (Rivera, 2012). Again, J Elrick (2016), conducted a study on immigrant hiring processes at ICT companies in Greater Toronto area to show that there is organizational level variation among firms in three key aspects of hiring that are relevant to the discussion of immigrant skill utilization: definition of skills, screening processes and the notion of 'cultural fit'. This highlights a need to further probe these areas, including the variations in the notions of 'culture fit.'

2.3 Theoretical lens

This study proposes to analyze organizational culture using the theoretical lens of Schein's model where organizational culture has been described as using three cognitive levels – the superficial organizational attributes (artifacts) that can be seen, felt, and heard, the norms within the organization as well as the tacit assumptions and beliefs (espoused values) good for the organization. This model would help to simplify and understand clearly the paradoxical organizational behaviors. Schein (1992), defines culture of a group

as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. Organizational culture can be defined as the basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be, that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and their overt behavior (Schein, 1996). Artifacts, espoused values, basic assumptions, and values are the three levels of organizational culture according to Schein. It is the key to organizational excellence (Schein 1992).

2.4 Inclusion

The paper by Singh (2012) examines gender inclusivity in corporate India adopting a resource-based view, considering the reality of gender inclusion becoming a business imperative. Singh (2012), besides highlighting the necessity of gender inclusivity for talent development and retention, states that such initiatives cannot thrive and deliver results without a supportive culture and an inclusive environment. However, this study has not considered the contextual factors and thus warrants the need for future research to focus on the cultural aspect too. The study done by Daya (2014), facilitated deep insights into the diversity and inclusion components in an emerging market context, it highlights the need for pluralistic and multicultural organizations to focus heavily on recruitment in future research, pointing it out as one of the many first steps to create an inclusive environment. Again, this study does not consider any other organizational contextual factors. The study by Joshi et al. (2015), while conducting an overview of five decades of empirical research on gender, calls for broader and deeper studies to understand the complexities that define gender inequality in organizations, emphasizing the need to focus on developing an inclusive culture.

To be able to bring about multilevel, systemic, sticky changes requires operating at three levels – systemic, cultural, and behavioral. Combating some of the deep rooted and embedded social and organizational assumptions requires a combination of formal and informal practices and the need to be reflexive and recursive (Kalev, 2009). Both formal and informal organizational practices and processes work to inform preferences in selection, allocation of work and the extent of supervision and promotions, affecting the inclusion of women in the workplace (Anderson-Gough et al., 2005). Vohra and Chari (2015), in their extant research on diversity and inclusion has pointed out the need for future research to focus on the premium that our culture places on relationships to facilitate inclusion interventions. Again, a study done by Vohra and Nair (2018), focusing on gender inclusion, revealed that inclusion practices and processes in the organizations studied, did consider societal, cultural biases as well as gender-based stereotypes. However, although the significance and power of informal narratives is highlighted in the study, it does not take a multi-stakeholder approach. This calls for future studies to focus beyond the change agents' perspectives and to also consider the change recipient's perspectives.

This literature review reveals that many of the studies reviewed here do not have a multi stakeholder perspective on culture fit, hiring or inclusion. Many of the studies focus on organizational culture or culture fit, culture fit and diversity or culture fit and hiring. Inclusion is a heavily under researched area in the

Indian context. Though still under- researched in the Indian context, few of the researchers who have studied inclusion have highlighted the need to investigate the cultural aspect also in future studies.

These gaps pave the way to formulate the problem statement and the research questions in this study. Basically, previous research has suggested that heterogeneous groups have different points of view and knowledge, consider a more comprehensive set of solutions, and debate each other's viewpoints more vigorously, leading to higher quality decisions (Hoffman & Maier, 1961; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992). Women can provide unique insights into the consumer behavior of customers and offer differentially beneficial perspectives (female) on client relations and overall business directions and practices than the mainstream (male) thinking (Bilimoria, 2000). Harnessing these advantages to the maximum would entail promoting a leadership development culture for women at all organizational levels and this would require a mind-shift at all levels in the organization (Bilimoria et al., 2008). There is a need to advocate for individual and organizational culture shifts that would support the themes of promoting women and in framing policies and procedures that would address the underlying issues (Bilimoria et al., 2008). Researchers have argued that the presence of a woman on the corporate board indicates that, whatever barriers to advancement by women may exist in society, the culture of the firm is friendly to women and committed to the advancement of women at all levels (Bilimoria, 2000; Daily & Dalton, 2003), enhancing the motivation and organizational commitment of women in lower-level managerial positions. There is evidence of tangible benefits in pursuing a strategy of board diversity in terms of gender, age, educational background, and independence in a corporate context and companies need to consider the implications of increasing female employees and female leadership more seriously (Mahadeo et al., 2011). There is still no question that we do not have enough women leaders in our workforce around the globe (Adler, 2015; Goryunova et al., 2017) although hundreds of studies have documented the benefits of having women in top management and leadership positions in any type of organization and society (Madsen, 2015). It is only through a willingness to cross paradigmatic boundaries that we can gain the best appreciation of how to accommodate the needs of women managers as well as deepen our understanding of the contribution they could make to firm performance (Dezso & Ross, 2012) .

However, women managers face many barriers in their advancement including, but not limited to overt discrimination (Oakely, 2000) and social pressure leading to unintentional discrimination by colleagues (Altonji & Blank, 1999). They may face a problem of incongruity between expectations about the actual and ideal behavior of women and men on the one hand and the attributes typically associated with successful leaders on the other (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Given that conceptions of leadership have been found to be associated preponderantly with men (Brenner et al., 1989; Heilman et al., 1995; Metcalfe & Altman, 2001; Schein, 1976) and standards of success are generally measured in male terms (Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008), assessments of leadership inherently reflect gender stereotypes and prejudices. According to Ibarra et al. (2013), 'despite a lack of discriminatory intent, subtle, 'second-generation' forms of workplace gender bias can obstruct the leadership identity development of a company's entire population of women'. Ross (2014), argues that even people who view themselves as progressive on gender issues and dynamics, including women themselves have hidden gender-based biases. Men on an average continue to earn more and advance into higher managerial levels than women (Blau & Kahn, 2007; Catalyst 2012a). Researchers argue that performance may matter less for female leaders pay than male leaders pay. Kulich et al. (2007) found that company performance is more strongly related positively to bonus pay for male CEOs than female CEOs, whereas perceptions of the leader's charisma is more strongly impacted by bonus pay for women. Widespread cultural beliefs about the association between demographic characteristics and

particular traits often shape evaluations and behavior unconsciously, even among those who disagree with the stereotype on a conscious level (Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006).
A company's success and its relation to diversity in top management is more complex an issue than numbers might lead one to think, which means that just promoting women is not guaranteed to make a firm more successful, but, in addition to researching women in senior positions, the organizational culture and its effects on a firm's returns should be studied as well (Nikkila, 2017). Male predecessors gender-inclusive gatekeeping facilitates female leader's success and this occurs when local enabling conditions and the embedded context enact agentic and structural mechanisms to alter leadership schemas (Misangyi, 2017). If actionable theories of gender integration are to be developed, researchers must refrain from taking a 'sex differences' approach and focus instead on identifying the structural and contextual factors that shape variability within each gender (Ely & Padavic, 2007).

Besides all this, there is ample evidence that there are inequities in the recruitment (Gaucher et al., 2011), selection (e.g.,Schmader, Whitehead & Wysocki, 2007), evaluation (Eagly et al., 1992) and promotion of women. Lack of clarity of the evaluation criteria as well as lack of specificity of the evaluative structure (how the criteria are to be combined) have all contributed to expectation- based distortion (Heilman, 2012). Current selection methods may disadvantage women as many of them lack accountability, which allows the opportunity for gender bias to influence the decision- making process (Powell & Graves, 2003). Research suggests that interviewers can be influenced by personal characteristics of the candidates that are not relevant to the requirements of the position, including attractiveness, race, gender and similarity in attitudes or background (Cable & Judge, 1977; Posthuma et al., 2002; Raza & Carpenter, 1987). Job interviews are crucial components of hiring in many industries, where the subjective impressions of candidates that employers develop through interviews are strong drivers of hiring decisions, often carrying more weight than candidates' resume qualifications (Graves and Powell, 1995). Although previous research has suggested that ingratiation and self-promotion have direct effects on interview outcomes, these effects are mediated by recruiter perceptions of fit (Higgins & Judge, 2004). To understand the effects of these influence tactics fully, future research must rely more heavily on the intricacies of interpersonal interactions that take place in the employment interviews (Higgins & Judge, 2004). Perceived similarity is thought to be more important than actual similarity in the decision to hire (Graves & Powell, 1995) and a critical source of perceived similarity is shared culture (Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

Previous research by Cable & Judge (1996) found a strong relationship between the 'perception of fit' and recruiter hiring recommendations. Dimaggio (1992), even goes so far as to call organizational recruitment as a "cultural matching process". The need to track the effect of fit through the stages of the hiring process, ending with the job offer has been emphasized (Brown, 2000). Werbel & Gilliland, (1999) also noted that more research is required to link fit to actual outcomes. Although scholars often hypothesize that cultural similarities between employers and job candidates matter for employers' decision (Lamont, 1992), systemic empirical research on the role of culture in hiring is virtually non- existent (Huffcut, 2011; Stainback et al., 2010). Rivera (2015) states that the original idea behind fit was that if companies hired individuals whose personalities and values – and not just their skills – meshed with an organization's strategy, workers would feel more attached to their jobs, work harder and stay longer."

To be able to bring about multilevel, systemic, sticky changes requires operating at three levels systemic, cultural, and behavioral (Stamarski et al., 2015), it is necessary for organizations to focus not only on gender diversity, but also provide an environment that fosters parity among men and women. Inclusion requires a change of mindset as well as behavior of the employees (Zetterquist & Renemark, 2016) which often becomes difficult to achieve. Perceptions of employee inclusion have been linked to organizational climate, characterized by fairness and a diverse climate (Deloitte, 2012; Shore et al., 2011). Culture fit is good for inclusion if there is a logical balance to be struck between hiring for fit and hiring for inclusion (Pophal, 2018). Being able to recognize and promote the uniqueness of different groups of a diverse workforce is not only acknowledged as instrumental in improving performance, but, also an imperative that organizations can no longer choose to ignore (Vohra & Chari, 2015).

Thus, although diversity management is an important agenda in most organizations today, the discourse is slowly shifting to one of inclusion. Factors influencing gender inclusion as well as the fault lines in managing issues around them need to be investigated. The role of culture fit in hiring decisions in organizations need to be explored, especially in those organizations implementing culture fit based hiring and where women are being selected or promoted. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to explore and understand the role of culture fitment in hiring processes in organizations and how they shape gender inclusion. This would help to understand how the managers conceptualize culture fit as well as the role and importance this construct has in real organizational contexts, especially in hiring processes in organizations. This will also shed further light on how to bridge the prevalent 'broken rung' in the pipe line and help to create an understanding on what contributes to promoting inclusive culture fitment- based hiring.

This leads us to the Research Questions:

2.5 Research Questions

1. How are culture fitment-based hiring processes shaped in organizations and how do they influence the assessment of women candidates?
2. How does culture fitment-based hiring impact women candidates' experiences and shape gender inclusivity in organizations?

2.6 Objectives

1. To explore the various organizational elements that shape culture fitment- based hiring processes and their role in assessing women candidates.
2. To study the experiences of women employees who have undergone and experienced selection procedures in the organization and to explore and understand how culture fitment-based hiring practices influence/shape gender inclusion in organizations.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

Qualitative Method of research is used in this study as this would enable interpretation of observed experiences and actions of individuals and groups in different contexts (Guha & Lincoln, 1994). It can provide a framework that is not only "about" or "on" participants but rather, "with" and "by" participants as co-creators (Wiles et al., 2011). The primary objective of this study is to explore the role of culture fit hiring processes in gender inclusion in organizations. Qualitative method of research is used here as it adopts an 'emic' perspective providing a holistic view of the problem within explained contexts and making use of personal insights while adopting a non-judgmental stance. It facilitates natural enquiry in the real-world using methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data is produced. Surveys using predefined questions and statements carry the risk of missing out on potentially significant information that can unexpectedly surface during face-to-face in-depth interviews. To accomplish the overall objective of the research, a research method with open questions that could allow the research participants to think about their responses has been used.

The research paradigm used in this study is a constructivist and interpretive approach. The ontological assumption of the qualitative paradigm is that there is no single reality or truth and that reality is created by individuals. This study proposes to use an ontology of 'social world of meanings' (Stake, 2005). There is an objective reality, but there is also a social construction of reality (Eisenhardt, 2021). Investigations in this study manifest in the form of interpretive designs to interact with the participants feelings and inner thoughts. Here, the participants have their own thoughts and interpretations. The epistemological stance in this study is constructivism. This study proposes to understand answers to 'how' questions and try to interpret reality using a constructivist approach. The learner or the researcher in this study would be constructing knowledge rather than passively take in information. As this study on 'culture fitment' is a study of meaning and interpretation, the stance adopted here is that of a constructivist approach (Crotty, 2003).

This study follows a combined approach adopting perspectives from three approaches (Eisenhardt, Yin & Stake) to best serve the research purpose. In this study, as per Eisenhardt's (1989) approach, there is a research gap which is identified and research questions are based on that research gap. Relevant constructs from the literature review are also a part of the research questions in this study and the research questions address little and conflicting prior empirical evidence. The analysis is based on the emerging themes and relationships. Again, as in the approach, the approach in this study is also not about the number of cases, rather, the number is influenced by theoretical issues like case design and theoretical saturation as well as by pragmatic factors like data availability, cognitive limits, and time. Both Eisenhardt (1994) and Yin (2003) are proponents of Within and Cross case analysis. Purposeful sampling and data triangulation are

advocated by both Yin and Stake (2005). This study also uses Purposeful sampling and data triangulation has been ensured here.

Research Design

In Qualitative method, the Case study approach is used in this study. Yin (1994) defines a case study in terms of the research process when he stated a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within the real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear. The interest here is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (Lewis & Leod, 2006). The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence, including documents, artefacts, interviews, and observations (Merriam, 1988). According to Yin (2003), case study design is considered when: a) the focus of the case study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions; b) contextual conditions are covered because one believes that they are relevant to the phenomenon under study. Yin (1994), suggested that for 'how' and 'why' questions, as is the case here, the case study has a distinct advantage over other research designs. Bromley (1986), claimed that Case studies have got as close to the subject of interest as possible partly by means of direct observation in natural settings and partly by access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires), whereas, experiments and surveys often use convenient derivative data. This study proposes to use the Multiple case study design (Yin, 2003), as this design replicates patterns, thereby increasing the robustness of findings (Yin, 2003; Vohra. V, 2014).

Again, the Case study design seemed appropriate for this study as this method allows the questions of why, what and how to be answered with a relatively full understanding of the nature and complexity of the complete phenomenon (Bebensat et al.,1987) and this resonates well with the research questions in this study. In this study, the focus is more on 'how' questions. Besides, the researcher cannot manipulate the relevant behavior. Contemporary events are examined in this research design (Yin, 1981). The phenomenon has been studied in its natural setting and meaningful relevant theory is generated from the understanding gained through observing actual practice (Bebensat et al, 1987). It is not possible to control the behavioral events here (Teegavarapu et al., 2009). Through this method, analytic generalizations have been created in this study, where the research findings have compared to themes and trends in current literature (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989). Further supporting the adoption of this approach here are the studies conducted by Vohra. N & Nair. N (2018), Rivera (2012), Fajerson (2017), to name a significant few. These researchers have conducted successful research in the areas of Culture fit, Diversity, and Inclusion, wherein the researcher has contributed valuable insights and findings through their case study-based research works. Rivera (2012) has indulged in Case study method to investigate the role of cultural similarity in hiring and has highly recommended the Case study approach involving interviews and participants observations as the approach most suited to study subjective interpretations and social processes (Yin, 2003). Again, this study does not aim at developing a universal theory of culture fitment hiring, but it intends to shed more light on a heavily under- examined dimension of hiring process, especially in the Indian context.

Collating all the significant reasons to explain the rationale for proposing to adopt Case study approach in this study: This method offers a level of flexibility which is not readily offered by other qualitative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The open-ended questions would allow research participants to think about responses, discuss underlying motivations and fears. Interview questions could be formulated in such a way so as to capture the culture elements. This approach has used three kinds of data collection (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 1988), of which review of documents would add value to this study by providing an understanding of existing policies and processes. Thus, data triangulation is also ensured here. The researcher cannot manipulate relevant behavior. Contemporary events are examined here (Yin, 2003). This approach could create analytic generalizations, when the research findings are compared to themes and trends in current literature (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989). Case study design has distinct advantage over 'how' and 'why' questions (Yin, 2003). It has been identified as the ideal approach for studying contextual conditions, as in this case, where they are relevant to phenomenon under study (Yin, 2003). Besides all this, Case studies tend to spread the net for evidence widely (Bromely, 1986). and can deal with full variety of evidence, including documents, interviews, and observations. It is also the ideal approach when interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable (Merriam, 1988).

To add further, the researcher was inspired to adopt this method as Case Studies have provided the management field with some of its most ground-breaking insights (Penrose, 1960; Chandler, 1962; Pettigrew, 1973; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Burgelman, 1983; Prahlad & Hamel, 1990). Again, Case Studies 'look carefully at individual case not in the hope of proving anything, but, rather in the hope of learning something' (Eysenck's, 1976; Flyvbjerg, 2006). This by itself is a compelling justification for using this research methodology. To examine gender inclusivity in Indian organizations from 'culture fit' based view, a multiple case design is used here as this approach enables exploration of differences within and between cases. The unit of analysis in this study is the organization. As mentioned earlier, the study adopts an interpretive approach. The type of case study method in this study is both descriptive as well as exploratory. Narrating experiences on the phenomenon and real-life context in which it occurs (Yin, 2003), warrants a descriptive type of case study design.

3.3 Definitions of Constructs used in the study

- Inclusion - Inclusion is defined as the psychological experience of feeling accepted and being treated as an insider in the workplace, while being able to retain one's unique identity (Pelled et al., 1999; Shore et al., 2011). Inclusion involves managing the dichotomy between affirming individual identities and integrating different groups (Dobusch, 2014).

- Culture - Schein (1992), defines culture of a group as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore , to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. Culture can be defined as the "learned

beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols and traditions that are common to a group of people" (Northouse, 2013). Culture is a complex (multidimensional and multilevel) and dynamic phenomenon consisting of both visible and invisible characteristics that may influence leadership (Connerley & Pederson (2005). These categories of culture include demographic characteristics (place of residence, physical gender), status characteristics (economic and educational variables), ethnographic characteristics (nationality, ethnicity, language) and affiliations. Implicit to all perspectives of cultural studies is that culture shapes the values and attitudes that affect people's perceptions, including human phenomenon like leadership (Ayman et al., 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liu et al., 2012). Culture may be an important factor in determining how well an individual fits into an organizational context (Caldwell & O' Reilly, 1990; Kilman et al., 1986).

- Organizational Culture – Organizational culture can be defined as the basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be, that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and their overt behavior (Schein, 1996). Artifacts, Espoused values and Basic assumptions and values are the three levels of organizational culture according to Schein. It is the key to organizational excellence... and the function of leadership is the creation and management of culture (Schein 1992). It is a set of shared assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Organizational culture refers to a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations. This system of shared meaning is, a set of key characteristics that the organization values. (Pareek et al., 2003). Also, organizational culture may influence how much employees identify with their organization (Schrodt, 2002).

- Culture Fit - The concept of person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996) can be traced to Schneider's attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework (Schneider, 1987), which suggests that people and organizations are attracted to one another based on their similarity. Cultural Fit is defined as the individual's attitudes, values and beliefs being in line with the core values and culture of an organization (https://www.companymatch.me. Culture may be an important factor in determining how well an individual fits into an organizational context (Caldwell & O' Reilly, 1990; Kilman et al., 1986).

- Context - Ovretveit (2014) defines context as 'all factors that are not part of a quality improvement intervention itself,' and various authors have developed taxonomies, theoretical and conceptual frameworks to delineate key elements of context that influence the success of quality improvement initiatives. Typical aspects of context highlighted in such frameworks include leadership, organizational culture, teamwork, resources, organizational characteristics and various external environmental factors.

3.4 Sampling

The cases have been selected to facilitate investigation of the issue or phenomenon and to enable answering the research questions (Crowe et al., 2011). This includes exploring and understanding how culture fitment-

based hiring would shape gender inclusivity in organizations and to identify the organizational elements that could be contributing to an effective culture fitment-based hiring process in those organizations. To facilitate an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon and respond effectively to the research questions on culture fitment and gender inclusivity, it was essential to study a sample consisting of organizations that were indulging in culture fitment-based hiring and reported to be performing well in terms of gender inclusivity. With these criteria in mind, the GPTW (Great place to Work) list of 2021 was referred to as the organizations listed therein across various sectors had been rated high on trust index, culture index and gender inclusivity. Access was also a major consideration as the selected cases, apart from being interesting, also needs to be hospitable to the inquiry, be informative and answer the research questions (Yin, 2009). Thus, the BFSI sector was identified. Out of the 30 organizations that were listed in the GPTW list of 2021 in BFSI sector, many organizations were approached through emails with a request to participate in the study. The search finally narrowed down to three organizations that had responded positively to participate in the study. All the three organizations were implementing culture fitment-based hiring – ie., culture fitment was a significant evaluation criterion in their hiring and selection processes. Culture fitment hiring being a 'sufficient' condition for gender inclusivity, selecting cases based on this independent variable has helped to avoid selection bias (Lebow, 1981; Dion, 1998). Multiple cases were chosen as it would offer the advantage of allowing comparisons to be made across cases or replication (Yin, 1994). The approach used is both descriptive and exploratory in nature, wherein typical cases have been selected to understand the phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier, Purposive sampling is used here. Patton (2002), describes Purposive sampling as selecting respondents because they are 'information rich' and 'illuminative' or they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest. This study is conducted in the BFSI sector (Banking, Financial Services & Insurance), focusing on three organizations within this domain. To explore and understand culture fitment and its impact on gender inclusivity, it was crucial to base the study on that sector that, at that point of time, was excelling in diversity hiring. Besides having multiple generations and thus multiple perspectives under a single roof, the BFSI sector has been recognized for its commitment to diversity, boasting a reported diversity hiring rate of 36% (CNBC, 2020) and had securing a leading position in diversity hiring (ETHRWorld, 2020). Even during the pandemic, the BFSI sector was at the forefront to introduce more flexible work options, wherein the decisions to transition to a hybrid model, if necessary, where largely driven by the employee's desires and preferences rather than solely focusing on the company's preferences (ETHRWorld 2021). Importantly, BFSI sector's inclusion in the GPTW (Great Place to Work) survey list of 2021, underscores its reputation for fostering the most credible workplace cultures, high on both trust index as well as culture index. Most importantly, as mentioned earlier, all the three organizations chosen in BFSI sector were having culture fitment as an evaluation criterion in their hiring processes, aligning with the overarching goal of this study: to investigate how culture fitment-based hiring contributes to gender inclusivity in the organizations. To achieve this aim, it is imperative to grasp the concept of culture fitment comprehensively, including the various elements that play a role in shaping these fitment-based hiring processes. Further, the study aims to elucidate how culture fitment influences gender inclusivity by examining the experiences of the women candidates and employees who have been involved in and have gone through the various hiring or promotion processes in the organization.

The GPTW (Great Place to Work) assessment of 2021 confirms BFSI as one of the best sectors to work in, for women. Great Place to Work certification is the most definitive 'Employer-of-choice' recognition that organizations aspire to achieve which is recognized world over by employees and employers alike and

is considered the 'Gold Standard' in identifying and recognizing Great Workplace Cultures. Here, the fact that the organizations are studied under two lenses (Trust Index & Culture Audit) that evaluates the quality of employee experiences as well as the quality of people practices in the organizations irrespective of gender, confirms the prevalence of good inclusion practices. Thus, this convergence of good diversity hiring as well as inclusion practices in this sector would strongly facilitate and support an in-depth study of the culture fitment aspect as well as gender inclusion and shed light on how our understanding of culture fitment-based hiring could be improved. As mentioned earlier, it is crucial to note here that it is not about the number of cases, rather, this number is influenced by theoretical issues like case design and theoretical saturation as well as by pragmatic factors like data availability, cognitive limits, and time (Eisenhardt, 1989), which collectively inform the selection and analysis of cases in this study. Also, an effective sample size is less about numbers and more about the ability of data to provide a rich nuanced account of phenomenon under study for which 9-17 interviews are adequate as long as data/thematic saturation is reached (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

These three organizations from the BFSI sector have been referred throughout the study as Case A, Case B and Case C to ensure anonymity. All the three organizations belong to the GPTW survey list of 2021. The sample includes a total of 12 employees from each organization. The sample from each organization is divided into – Group 1 and Group 2. Group I participants consist of 3 HR team members (male/female) and 3 hiring panel members (male/female). Group 2 participants include 6 'only female' employees (3 female employees who have been hired recently, ie; completed at least 3 months but not exceeding one year and 3 female employees who have undergone promotion interviews/ have had promotions in the organization). The researcher feels that the study would benefit better from adopting a multiple perspective approach, and hence, the participants in Group one includes both male and female HR personnel and employees belonging to both middle and senior management.

Data Collection & Management

To investigate the role of culture fit in hiring in these organizations, the researcher has used semi - structured interviews backed up by unstructured interviews and interactions which are suited to study such subjective interpretations and social processes (Yin, 2003). Primary data was gathered from the semi structured interviews and observations made during the field visits which enabled to capture the non-verbal behavior and other nuances of participant interactions. Secondary data consisted on the company documents that included Annual reports, newspaper articles, articles posted on LinkedIn, Job descriptions etc, few of which the researcher had managed to collect during the site visits. The data collected using all these data collection tools has enabled the researcher to capture the cultural elements and the interview experiences of the female employees to the best extent possible. Open ended questions were used during the interviews as they are highly adaptive, constitutes a rich source of data, reflects empathy and also enables building good rapport (Nadler, 1977

Once the sample was decided, open ended questions were formulated for the semi structured interviews). The case study protocol adopted the funnel model wherein the questions are broad and open ended and as the interview progressed, the questions became more specific and detailed. These questions were formulated in such a way so as to attain a good understanding of the hiring process in the organization, the organizational culture, the various experiences around organizational culture, various interview experiences, culture related challenges faced in the organization, exit interviews etc. Emails were sent to the HR heads of each organization, requesting for a meeting either online or personally. The mail included a brief outline of the study along with research objectives and sample requirements. The researcher also used this opportunity to assure the authorities that total confidentiality of all the participants would be ensured throughout the study. The researcher was asked to do a presentation to the HR heads. Towards the end of the presentation, the HR heads also shared their valuable inputs on the area. The meetings ended with a discussion on how best to proceed with the study. The researcher managed to also fix up an interview with the HR heads as per their convenience. The interviews for Group one respondents of Case A were coordinated and timings and dates were fixed by the Assistant to the HR head. The contact numbers of Group 2 participants were shared with the researcher and the interviews were fixed with each participant at a time that was convenient them. Similar was the case for Case B and Case C. In the case of Case B, the interviews for both group 1 and group 2 participants were coordinated and fixed by the HR assistant. Each interview lasted for a duration of 40 minutes to an hour. Consent was obtained from all the three HR heads to record the interviews, depending on the comfort level of the participant. Interviews were recorded for all the group 1 and group 2 participants. In the case of Group 2 participants, especially in the case the fresh recruits, the researcher ensured that they were made totally at ease and assured full confidentiality before starting the interview.
(The details of the participants are shown in the Data Accounting Sheet, Chapter 7)

Majority of the interviews happened online and very few of them were face to face. The interviews were recorded. Memoing happened as well as winnowing of the data. As mentioned earlier, more data was secured through documents and observations which also enabled data triangulation. Field notes were made to record accounts of events or activities observed as well as reflexive notes. The researcher was able to observe the interactions between the employees in the organization during these field visits and this contributed to attaining valuable insights on the culture in each of the organizations. Not only Annual reports, but data gathered from various media sources contributed further to these insights. Photographs were taken during the site visits. For instance, one of the interesting observations made was that Case C organization had a huge number of certificates and trophies on one side of the wall in the reception area and various photographs of the entire team reflecting good bonding and camaraderie between employees on the opposite wall, that was suggestive of a good balance between 'excellence in performance' and a 'family oriented culture'.

3.6 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and Thematic analysis was done to identify the codes, categories and themes. To help immerse totally in the data, the researcher had personally transcribed much of the audio interviews to written format. This process involved repeatedly listening to the audio recordings until both

the words and the tone of the original interview were adequately captured. By transcribing the audio interviews, the researcher increased her familiarity with the raw data and this further enhanced her ability to find connections or themes that emerged from this research. Both deductive and inductive coding were resorted to, although major part of the coding was inductive. The researcher had resorted to manual coding. Line by line open coding of the interview transcripts was done to identify the initial codes. First and second cycle coding was done to identify the categories and themes which formed the groundwork for developing the propositions. Within case analysis as well as cross case analysis was done to check for internal and external validity. When using multiple cases, a typical format would be to first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis (Creswell, 1998). The within-case analysis is followed by a thematic analysis across the cases referred to as cross-case analysis or cross case synthesis (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003).. The identified themes were further analyzed to answer each of the research questions. Researchers assert that the cyclical processes of coding, identifying themes, comparison of data only to find new categories and themes is a natural part of the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2006, Glaser, 1992). When the pattern from one data source is corroborated by evidence from another the findings would become stronger. In an effort to eliminate any researcher bias inherently possible in this type of research, the data collected, the Within Case analysis findings as well as the researcher's observations and reflections were shared and verified with the respective HR heads in each organization.

(Within case analysis of each case as well as Cross case analysis explained in chapters 4, 5 6,&7)

3.7 Data Triangulation

Primary data was collected through semi structured interviews using open ended questions. Observations made by the researcher during the site visits also enabled collection of primary data by capturing the non-verbal behavior and participant interaction. Secondary data was collected through Company documents like Annual reports, newspaper articles, articles on various social media websites like LinkedIn etc and Job description. The first phase of the study focused on understanding the context of the study in each of the organizations and included the semi structured interviews. The second phase involved the observations which happened during the site visits, where the researcher could witness first-hand the interactions happening between the employees, between the employer and employee, the formal interactions as well as the informal interactions. These visits proved to be very insightful. The field notes made during these visits also contributed towards the coding process. The observations helped to identify some of the complexities during the decision- making processes. All these facilitated cross validation and further exploration. Thematic analysis was done on this data that was collected. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the case descriptions as well as the themes derives from the within case analysis of each case was verified by HR personnel in all the three organizations. Few minor inputs which were given to the researcher in one of the organizations. were also incorporated. Besides all this, the various company documents collected during site visits as well as accessed online through the company websites, newspapers and LinkedIn pages were also a third major source of data and understanding of the context. These company documents and articles helped to further reconfirm the data collected through the other two sources. In short, data collected through the interviews, observation, and company documents, and analyzed, were verified by HR personnel of each

organization. Thus, data triangulation was ensured.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, transparency, thick contextual description and reflexivity are criteria that has been adhered to in order to ensure the element of trustworthiness in this study. Spending adequate time to learn about the culture reflecting on the potential distortions introduced by the participants as well as the researcher and their impacts (Lincoln & Guha, 1985) would all contribute to building the element of trust. Identification of the various characteristics and elements most relevant to the problem under study and focusing on them in detail (Bush & Amechi, 2019) has ensured depth of study. Thus, observation has provided the depth whereas prolonged engagement has ensured scope of the study (Bush & Amechi, 2019). As mentioned in the case study protocol, the data collection procedure which is a combination of semi-structured interviews, observations and document reviews has ensured data triangulation. This has enabled to analyze the research questions from more than one perspective (Patton, 1970).

By coming up with the case that is deviating from the findings emerging from the data analysis of other cases, the researcher has developed an understanding on why such outliers exist. This amplification of understanding of data strengths and weaknesses has reinforced the study findings trustworthiness (Patton, 1990). Apart from leading to meaningful findings useful to various stakeholders, thick contextual descriptions would enable emergence of theoretical insights about people and systems which could also be transferred beyond the original context (Patton & Krefting, 1991). Reflexivity has ensured that preconceptions, if any, has been accounted for during the study, which would ensure transparency and thus trust. Above all, the context rich and detailed descriptions collected through the narratives during the interviews along with data triangulation and transparency all help in ensuring the credibility of this study.

As mentioned earlier, in the case study protocol, the data collection procedure adopted is a combination of semi-structured interviews (primary data) as well as documents and observation (secondary data) ensuring data triangulation. Semi structured interviews have more flexibility and allow a better understanding of the perspectives of the interviewees (Daymon et al., (2000). Besides, interviewing personnel from different levels of the organization has enabled the collection of multiple perspectives. Views of individuals from all relevant sections of the organization has been obtained and the views of more senior officials have not been given greater weight than the views of less highly placed persons (Yin, 2009; Gao, 1990).*(The Case Protocol has been included in the annexure.)*

Also, to ensure data has been captured the way it should be, this study has adhered to the COREQ (Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research) checklist.

(COREQ checklist has been included in the annexure.)

Chapter 4 - Within case analysis (Case A)

4.1 Case Description

The largest housing finance company serving rural India, CASE A extends across 13 states, with more than 650 branches spread across 80000 plus villages serving more than 9.5 lakh customers. Set up in 2007, they follow what has been coined as the 'Rise' philosophy which is all about optimism, the desire to create a better future, passion, alternative thinking that would challenge the status quo and the possibility of attaining whatever they set their minds to. Focused on customer centric innovation and keen on bringing around a transformational change in the lives of the rural customers, the company believes in encouraging people to be adaptive and agile while maintaining the highest standards of integrity. The Core values are entrepreneurship, integrity (financial, intellectual, and transactional integrity), team work, risk mitigation and customer centricity.

An organization with a high brand value and indulging in impactful work, Case A is one of the major companies that provides rural housing finance today to the market at the bottom of the pyramid segment. It was a very enriching experience to interview the employees in this organization. While conducting the interviews, one of the interviewees very beautifully narrated the story behind the product that the company was selling - housing finance catering to rural market. Most of the rural folks who constitute the farmers and daily wage laborers would typically depend on government schemes as well as their own savings, sometimes going to the extent of selling their own land, to finance construction of their houses. However, in majority of the cases, these houses are left unfinished or incomplete after a certain point and they would have already started residing in these 50-60 % unfinished houses, hoping to complete the work by the time an important occasion or event was to happen in the family. To complete the rest of the construction, they would typically resort to borrowing from the local money lenders who would obviously charge exorbitant rates of interest. This is where our organization pitches in, assuming the role of a 'savior', enabling the rural folks to borrow money at marginal interest rates and facilitating repayment in equated monthly instalments – a blessing for the people living in the rural areas – the underserved sector of society.

From the various interviews conducted, it was very clear that the company, being a rural housing finance company, mostly preferred or rather ensured that their recruitments, especially roles pertaining to both middle as well as junior level management happened from the rural areas only. This was mainly to ensure that the candidates or prospective employees would be able to easily 'fit' themselves into the culture of the organization. Irrespective of senior, middle level or junior management, the candidates were expected to have good alignment with the mission of the organization and have a strong 'seva bhavna'. Service mentality, passion to transform lives, passion to serve the rural market …all these were invariably significant qualities that were required. According to one of the senior managers in the organization who was involved in recruitment, it was highly essential to brief the candidate about his job profile and the realities of the kind of hard work involved, explaining exactly what his/her role entails, to avoid them from forming any false notions based on the company brand name.

The candidate's educational qualification, reasons for any gap occurring either in the candidates' education or work life, family background to assess commitment levels, candidate's standard of living, whether possessing a growth-oriented mindset ……. are some of the qualities that would get assessed during the selection process. For all senior management positions, there were certain standard competencies documented – collaborative, agile and bold. In the case of middle level and junior level candidates, the functional competencies that were relevant to departments and more importantly, the behavioral aspects that were assessed through interview, were integral. Again, for junior levels, candidates below 30yrs were preferred as they could afford to be more flexible, especially while handling the rural markets.

At the junior and middle level management, hiring process followed a similar pattern. The field level employee would be recruited by the branch manager, the branch manager would be selected by the territory manager who in turn gets recruited by the Area manager. The next step would be approval from the Human Resources, after which the candidate would get selected for onboarding process. The man power plan usually is decided by March or April and a budget would be allocated to each department. The candidate pool usually consists of referrals from the employees, freshers from campus recruitments as well as references from the customers themselves. This indicates the fact that the company follows a highly customer-oriented business approach. Campus recruitments were not as popular as recruitments happening through referrals or walk - ins and besides, the company believed in recruiting mainly from tier three colleges or three or four tier towns and mostly locally. Media (paper ads) was a last resort for recruitment. However, employee referrals recently had been reduced by 10 percent. Tests were normally conducted only for internal promotions. For senior level recruitments (above Branch Manager level), mostly candidates were preferred from B-schools or with solid work experience and mainly through referrals. They were required to undergo a layered process. They had to take up the OPQ32 test and undergo series of interviews conducted by the HR as well as other senior management personnel. Once they cleared the interviews as well as the test, there would be a background verification that happened. The credit history/ CIBIL score as well as medical fitness was also assessed and approved before the candidate was finally selected for senior management positions. As one of the interviewees pointed out, 'trust' was a highly valued element in the culture of the company.

Talking about the 'customer kin hiring' that happens, it was a relatively new and innovative approach adopted by the company wherein the candidate's integrity was assured as the highly valued customer himself/herself would have recommended the candidate. Linked in hiring was also gradually becoming popular in the organization. Another new and upcoming form of hiring was the hiring that happened through a third-party agency wherein graduates or 10 +2 candidates are taken in, imparted training and observed for a year. After this, they undergo a digital assessment where-in cognitive as well as functional abilities were tested and those who get through were finally taken on board.

Moving on to the process of data collection in Case A, once the organization was identified from the GPTW list, a mail was sent to the HR head with details of the study and requesting for a meeting either online or in person. A presentation was done online wherein the HR head, once convinced, discussed the best way to take the study forward in the organization. The researcher was introduced to an HR manager who assisted the researcher in coordinating the interviews with employees of the organization. A detailed mail with details of the participants was also exchanged. The fact that the HR head refused to view the interview questions beforehand indicates the high level of faith they had in the researcher. This was quite overwhelming and the researcher has taken extreme care to ensure that the interviews were conducted in such a way that all the participants were totally comfortable with the process and full confidentiality is ensured. The researcher managed to build a good rapport with the participants and each one of them agreed for a follow up interview

session, if required.

As mentioned earlier, the interview participants were grouped into two – Group 1 and Group 2. Group 1 participants consisted of three HR team members, either male or female and three hiring panel members, either male or female. Group 2 comprised of only female participants, 3 fresh recruits with at least 3 months' work experience in the organization, but not more than a year and 3 female employees who had undergone promotions in the organization. These participants were interviewed. Most of the interviews were online due to the constraints posed by the pandemic. The interviews were transcribed and coded. Deductive and inductive coding was done and most of the codes were descriptive codes and few in-vivo codes. The codes were again grouped to form categories and themes. Below, the researcher explores the various themes as well as the categories that have contributed towards formulating the themes. A summary of the findings in connection to the strategic elements of the research question is also discussed here.

4.2 Themes and Categories (Group 1)

Theme 1

Value based hiring philosophy

This theme responds to the first research objective on the various organizational elements that shape culture fitment-based hiring processes. The categories under this theme are 'Leveraging rural community while hiring', 'Referrals as major source of hiring and Fitment based hiring process.

Leveraging rural community while hiring

During the interview, while the participants were being asked to describe what constituted a 'good fit' for them while hiring, one of the participants who is an HR manager replies – "a person who is born and brought up in Hyderabad, if I ask him to go and work in Nashik, will that work? Will that be right hiring? No". These words indicate that the respondent attributes importance to hiring from the local community as much as possible in order to have candidates who possess similar values. The participant goes on to say – "I cannot hire a person from a city and put him into a village. So, this is also a culture fitment". These words of the participant indicate the significance associated to the candidate being form a local or similar background and upholding similar values. The same sentiment is echoed in the words of another participant who is also a manager as well as a hiring panel member, when he says – "mostly the frontline kids are hired from the local market". And since they would be working in their own community, the area which they belong to, they also prefer to join us."

Another respondent emphasizes leveraging the rural community while hiring to facilitate stronger bonds between employees and customers, who are also largely from the rural areas. According to this participant, - "I always look at whether this boy can go into the field or not. Whether he really requires this job or not? There are many of these rural folks whose standard of living might be very poor…. they are in need of money to uplift themselves and so their need for the job and willingness to do hard work would be lot more than any candidate from any city". Again, according to another participant, also a senior HR manager and

hiring panel member – "we would like to hire more people from the rural side than urban areas. We want our employees to be customer friendly rather than you know, the hi-fi English-speaking guy …...we would like to see him/her mingle with the customer in the rural area, like a family member". Some of the other codes which were identified under this category are – focus on rural market, "workforce hiring from rural villages", "local hiring for good employee customer interaction", hiring sources aligned to organization's mission, hiring from similar backgrounds, local hiring for effective interactions etc.

Referrals as major source of hiring

One of the categories under the theme 'value-based hiring philosophy' is 'referral-based hiring' that happens in the organization. Very interesting excerpts from the interviews suggest that such referral-based hiring apart from the advantages they pose to the employers and other employees in terms of alignment of values, also plays a major role in contributing to the alignment between the hiring strategy and business strategy of the organization.

According to one of the respondents, a senior HR manager as well as hiring panel member, - "whenever we open a new branch, we'll go for referral-based candidates. Because we have many customers today, we are also having many employees. So, we will have more confidence in our employees. This is a very rural product that requires a lot of passion, correct? So, we require a self-starter, someone who can understand the customer mindset well. So, what better solution than the customers themselves or other employees referring candidates to us? If we hire the Branch Manager, the Branch Manager will bring in the other customer managers…..." These words indicate that referral-based hiring, be it through the customers or other employees, facilitates aligning of values between the employers and employees in the organization. Again, another respondent, also a senior HR team member and hiring panel member says – "we would give preference to customer's family members. Many of our candidates come through references of existing employees too. The participant adds – "Even at higher levels, where we are keen to know about his performance in the current organization he is working in, we take a reference from that organization". Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are - stakeholder references, "customer kin hiring," hiring through customers, employee references, "referral hiring ensuring trust", referral hiring ensuring reliability", preference for customer's family members, preference for internal candidates etc.

Culture fitment-based hiring process

The interviews clearly suggest that the hiring process followed in the organization is a fitment-based hiring process – that is based on the culture of the organization that focuses on the alignment of values between the candidate and the organization. Based on the excerpts from the interview, few of the significant attributes that are focused on during hiring include the "able to empathize rural hardships", "fire in the belly", willing to do hard work, self-starter, dedication to job, willingness to travel, family background, "Seva Bhavna", good interpersonal skills, customer friendly attitude, respect for family, respect for money, commitment, integrity etc. The organization also boasts of a values framework comprising of integrity, customer centricity, entrepreneurship, teamwork, and risk mitigation. This theme suggests that the hiring philosophy of the organization seems to focus on these values which revolve around the 'family culture' in the organization. Here, the focus seems to be more on these values than the competencies or functional fitment.

According to one of the respondents, - "our first choice is from within the organization. If I recruit a Branch manager from the market, he might try and hire someone from that organization where he had been working in before joining our place….and the recruit from that organization will end up being a misfit here. There is no fitment over here…. this recruitment will not be proper and we will have to then try and train that person to suit our requirements." These words reflect the high level of significance the organization is associating to culture fitment in hiring. Again, another respondent, also a senior HR team member and hiring panel member says – "We can recruit people from tier 1 and tier 2 cities who are doing their MBAs in Schools…we can. We have this huge brand name…. but, the culture of these people will not fit that in the rural area. So, this is something we are conscious about at the time of recruitment. People should be able to mingle with the customers …they should be able to mingle with them like a family member." These words clearly suggest the level of priority the hiring managers seem to be associating to culture fitment in their organization. It also very interestingly points to the fact that these managers seem to be associating more importance to 'values alignment' than any aspect of functional fitment.

Another senior HR manager, also a hiring panel member cited an interesting example to highlight the significance of 'culture fit' in their evaluation process. According to this respondent- "suppose there is an ex-military guy who has taken voluntary retirement after some 6-7 years and now wants to work with us. We also look out for those kinds of people. Their goals and values are highly inclined to our company …his integrity is paramount and his work undoubted. So, this is what we are looking for, alignment with company core values. These people will be highly responsible too…. even more than any guy you hire with experience in the same industry." The researcher found this very insightful and could not help feeling amazed at the highly inclusive outlook of these hiring managers, even though they were mostly from a rural set up. Some of the codes under this theme are "background verification ensuring fitment," "family background assessed", "easy background verification, "values and goals aligned to company", "credit history verification ensuring integrity", multiple screening etc.

Theme 2

Customer focused business strategy aligned to culture fitment-based hiring strategy

One of the major themes that emerged as a result of the coding process was the significance the organization attached to customer centricity. One of the core values of the organization, their focus was on customer needs and how best they could serve their customers without compromising their interests as an organization. The study revealed that the organization's business strategy revolves around identifying the customer needs, being empathetic in their dealings with the customers, having mutual respect and designing and delivering products and services, always keeping the customers in mind. This theme is in response to the first research question on the various elements that shape culture fitment-based hiring processes. The categories supporting this theme are: High customer focus, Fitment based hiring process, Supporters and enablers of culture fitment hiring.

High customer focus

High customer focus is reflected in the words of all the respondents while they narrated experiences of incidents or situations that reflect "mutual respect and perfect understanding between employees and

customers". According to one of the respondents, who was a very senior member in the hiring panel, "the product requires a lot of passion. The candidate must be a self-starter who needs to understand the customer mindset – what time they wake up, what time they sleep, what time they go for work, where they chat and all that." These words clearly reflect the high level of priority that is attributed to customers. In the words of another senior hiring panel member: "In this business, culture and trust are the two things you cannot ignore. Customers keep coming back to us because we value their association, we respect them, we treat them with dignity. We help them. We are very serious about customer complaints. It is this culture that is driving our way of business dealing. Any business connects you to the transformation a customer undergoes, the benefit he/she receives by business that you are doing. That is more soul stirring and uplifting than the feeling you get when you receive your salary!" These words indicate the high level of significance given to customer service in the organization. It also reveals the strong connect or alignment between the culture in the organization and customers.

Another respondent, a female employee who is a senior manager in HR, having undergone promotions in the organization, spoke at length about customer kin hiring that is one of the major sources of recruitment in the organization. In her words: "Some of our customers have been excellent at repaying our loans on time and we have a good rapport with them, we would ask them if their children would like to join our company. This is something new and interesting we have been doing for a couple of years now. I mentioned it as it is an important source of hiring for us and the integrity of the candidate is not in question then." Here, the customer kin hiring concept that is there in the organization which forms a major part of the organization's hiring strategy is beautifully explained in the words of this senior HR manager. An HR hiring panel member says: "We treat our customers like our family members". The "employees doing every bit to ensure customer delight", "making efforts to understand customer mindset", "customer friendly environment", local hiring to facilitate customer employee interactions, "employees thriving on the satisfaction they get by transforming customer lives", "high confidence levels of employers while hiring customer references" all clearly indicate and support the high focus given to customers in the organization.

Culture Fitment based hiring process

The second category under this theme is 'culture fitment based hiring process.' This category again demonstrates the close relationship between customer focus and culture in the organization. The excerpts from the respondents reveal that customer focus seems to be a significant part of what constitutes culture fitment in the organization. As mentioned earlier, the organization's mission is to transform rural lives together. Their purpose is to challenge conventional thinking and drive positive change. Their core values are integrity, customer centricity, team work, risk mitigation and entrepreneurship. Almost all the respondents emphasized the significance of 'seva bhavna' (service mindset) towards customers as an important attribute for a prospective candidate, a value deeply ingrained in the organization's founders' and upheld through generations.

The interviews reveal that these aspects are thoroughly evaluated to ensure 'candidate fit'. For instance, according to one of the respondents, who is a part of the hiring panel: "we want people to be customer friendly rather than the, you know, hi-fi English-speaking guy or hi tech and everything! We would like to see our employee mingling with the customer like a family member and that is also why we give preference to customer's family members." The respondent emphasized the importance of values like integrity and commitment in assessing candidate's suitability.

Another respondent, a female employee who has undergone promotions and been a part of the hiring panel said: "there is a background verification that happens for them as well as their credit history. Majority are

referrals as integrity and reliability are ensured then! I think there needs to be a huge alignment to the mission. If somebody is not really interested in transforming lives for customers, which is our mission, they will not survive in this job as it is a very difficult job involving lot of travel in rural areas especially at lower levels. Through our interviews we assess whether the candidate has that alignment to the mission….and a sense of seva Bhavna which is very important for us." These words again reveal how important 'culture fitment' is in the organization's hiring process and how evaluation of this fitment is connected to the focus the organization has on customers. "In terms of Seva Bhavna, we will try to figure out if they have worked in projects or any other work where they had to find out the pain point of the customer and how they went about doing that!" These words of an HR hiring panel member indicate the high level of priority the interviewers associated to candidate fitment in terms of values like 'Seva Bhavna' and 'understanding of customer needs'.

Supporters and enablers of culture fitment hiring

The third category, 'Supporters and enablers of culture fitment hiring' highlights the various factors that facilitate culture fitment-based hiring and also contributes towards the customer-oriented business strategy in the organization. "Referral hiring enabling better fitment", "high rating by manager for culture fitment", "More internal sourcing to attain and retain fitment", "core values of the company to reflect in candidate", "Culture fitment primary criterion", "candidate fitment extremely important", hiring from similar backgrounds, "Candidate goals and values to align with company goals and values", "core DNA of business-culture", "whether this guy fits in", "right hiring – culture hiring" all indicate the significance associated by the management to culture fitment as an evaluation criterion. Moreover, many of these elements inherently embed a focus on the customer. Therefore, 'customer focus' or 'customer centricity, is integral to the organization's culture and this aspect of the culture fitment is given paramount importance while hiring the candidate. Hence, the customer-oriented business strategy in the organization seems to align seamlessly with the culture fitment based hiring strategy.

Theme 3

Family oriented and service-oriented culture - a reflection of Founders values

This theme again responds to the first research question and research objective on exploring the various organizational elements that shape the culture fitment based hiring process. Founders Values is one of the organizational elements that shape the culture in the organization. The interviews reveal that the attribute of 'Seva Bhavna' or service mentality was one that was strongly propagated by the founder and passed down various generations in the organization. The categories under this theme are described below along with excerpts to support this theme.

Family Culture

According to one of the senior HR managers, also a member of the hiring panel – "our family culture truly motivates us. In this company everyone works like a family, top to bottom. The closeness is there. We grow as a family and together we are facing challenges and results." These words reflect the strong close-knit

bond that is there between the employees in the organization. Very interestingly, the manager also mentioned the possibility of "non-performance cropping up" in such a family-oriented set up. In the words of another HR manager, also a hiring panel member, - "I always ask and insist on the employees meeting once a week or once in two days to discuss any problem or issue they would be facing. I tell them to think as a family and to facilitate the creation of a family atmosphere. In fact, I sometimes tell the employees in my team, you can talk to me like an elder brother…that gives them the confidence that someone is there to handhold them." He adds – "Some employee will come to me and tell me his father is unwell and he is not able to focus on work. I will immediately tell him to focus on his family first…. because only then, I feel you can do good work. I will give him 10 days leave to go and take care of his father". The researcher was amazed by the extent to which these managers would go to in order to create a close-knit family atmosphere. The manager proudly added – "Bonding, the family culture, timely appreciation to the employees, taking good care of them …these are all the reasons this company has got the Great Place to Work award."

In fact, one of the manager's responses indicates very clearly as to how this 'family culture' impacts the women employees in the organization. This sentiment was echoed by majority of the managers and provides valuable insight for both the research questions. The manager, also a hiring panel member, says: - "Most of these female employees are in the organization for a longer run because they love to work here. I always tell them that this is your family, this is your organization. I have given them that confidence not to worry because all of us are there with you." Adding a touch of humor to this study, another respondent who is a hiring panel member spoke about the various ways in which he would address his team members. In his words – "You know, I used to call my team members like brother, like younger brother. In Tamil, we would say 'Thambi'! They would call me 'Anna'! We don't say 'Sir' and all that …. we'll say Anna and Tambi and all. So that kind of shows the relation we have with each other." The extent of bond (like a family) between the employees is evident in these narratives.

Again, another respondent shared a very touching incident wherein his words reflected the high level of bonding they felt for each other. He spoke about a very valuable employee who was with the organization for nearly 11 years, wanting to quit as he had had some trivial argument with his reporting manager. This employee was also at that time going through a bad phase on the personal front. In the words of the respondent who is an HR manager – "I tried my best to make him stay on…. when 11 years a person has stayed with you and then suddenly decides to move away, its like a family member dividing assets and liabilities and moving away". These words of the respondent say it all. The researcher realized that this bonding, simplicity, the regard, the confidence, they had in each other, the support that they gave each other in times of professional and personal crisis…. are all factors highly responsible for the low female attrition in the organization. Some of the codes that were identified under this category are – "functioning like a family unit," "close knit family culture", "customers treated like family", "bonding like one big family", "welcome to our family", "grow as a family" etc. In fact, the interviews conducted within the organization gives a lot of importance to "respect for family" as a attribute of the candidate to be assessed. Besides this, the candidate's "family background" is also checked by the managers before hiring the candidate.

Founder's values

Another category that surfaced and is a part of this third theme is Founder's values. This category addresses the first research question regarding the factors that shape culture fitment-based hiring processes within the organization. Below are some noteworthy excerpts that touches upon this aspect.

Amid describing the culture of the organization, one of the respondents, who is a hiring panel member says - “This is a culture that is brought up by Mr. X (anonymous). He retired in September last year. Every time he speaks, he would say that Case A (organization name anonymous) is a family. I will share with you a trivial thing…. whenever any new employee joins our organization, when he is inducted into our what’s app group, there would always be a message from our CEO saying so and so has joined as a Regional Business head or whatever, so lets all welcome him to ‘our family’. Everyone would respond echoing similar sentiments and welcome the new person into our Case A family.” These words of the respondent enabled the researcher to realize the extent to which the Founder has impact in molding the values and culture of the organization. Some of the codes grouped under this category are - “culture brought up by X Sir,” “culture crafted from top”, “values passed on to new employees” etc. There are other codes too under this category, but which are more contextual and requires a description of the entire situation to bring out this element. Hence, descriptive coding has been done here. Here, the researcher opted for descriptive coding and the code is assigned as “values from founder.” Again, ‘Seva Bhavna’ or service mentality is also a major candidate attribute that is reflected in the words of the respondent and the manager talks about a passion for helping the people in the rural areas to uplift themselves. The HR manager also mentions that this passion is something which originates “right from the top”. Thus, both family culture and seva bhavna are two crucial attributes which have been passed down from the founder, as ‘founder’s values’, which seems to reflect widely throughout the organization.

Seva Bhavna – non-negotiable candidate attribute

This category also responds to the first research question and research objective which is to explore the various organizational elements that have contributed to shaping the culture fitment hiring process in the organization. The hiring managers while assessing the candidate’s attributes, look for those who seem to be having a service mentality or ‘Seva Bhavna’ which is also a major aspect of the organization’s mission. This clearly reflects in all the respondent’s descriptions of the hiring process, where they also mention the attributes that
they would typically be looking out for in potential candidates. Few of the excerpts from the interviews that reflects this aspect are mentioned below.

According to one of the respondents – “its there, ats all passion…. passion to serve the underserved. That passion is important. If you have that, then you can win everything.” In another instance, one of the hiring panel members narrated an example of an interview he had had with a candidate. The candidate had discontinued his college and when questioned about the same, he replied saying that it was due to financial reasons. The manager, not really convinced verified the same and realized that it had happened as the candidate had gotten involved in some issues with a local group and had been thrown out of college. In the manager’s words – “you forget about the job. When your mother and father have toiled so hard, you should have understood the value of every rupee and their hard work and completed your studies. You should be knowing the pain someone goes through, understand and be able to have empathy for their hardship. If you are not capable of doing that, you will not be able to serve our rural folks with the passion and sincerity that is required.” The extent of importance the managers associated to ‘service mentality’ is clearly reflecting in these words. The researcher was fascinated by many more of such stories that were narrated, more so as in these modern current times, it is not very easy to see people with such values systems and dedication. Some of the codes that were grouped under this category are – “serving underserved in rural areas”, “service to rural folks”, management’s attitude of service and support, “organization of service mentality”, “Seva Bhavna as mission” etc.

Theme – 4

No preferential treatment for women and cognitive diversity – factors facilitating bias mitigation

This theme responds to both the first as well as the second research questions. Both these factors play a major role in shaping effective culture fitment hiring processes and contributes positively towards gender inclusivity. In the words of a senior HR professional - "We are hiring women in all roles…for all designations like field. Collection, credit, system, HR… you call it what not". This indicates the equal treatment which is imparted to female employees with absolutely no differentiation when it comes to handling roles that could be difficult. Again, another HR panel member says – "We have women casually handling even the toughest jobs". According to another senior HR professional – "I am an HR guy and I have women colleagues in my team who travel more and travel better than me! Similar sentiment is echoed in the words of this senior HR professional of group 2 when she says –
Sometimes handling collections in rural areas can be challenging or being in office with a large male work force has to be culturally okay with them. We can't promise that you will have a lady in office to have lunch with".

Cognitive diversity refers to different perspectives, backgrounds, educational levels, knowledge, information processing styles, skills etc. In the words of a senior HR panel member – "I have got a person who discontinued his engineering …I did conduct his interview thinking he could join collections". This indicates the fact that the hiring managers are open to hiring from different educational backgrounds. Even different industry personnel are hired here as is evident from the words of a senior HR hiring panel member - "There are different kinds of people we hire. Like there is this ex-military guy. their values would be inclined to ours; integrity is paramount and his work is undoubted and even more responsible than any guy we've hired from the same industry". Similar sentiments are echoed by another panel member who says – "I want to hire a guy in admin department who can handle important works, collaborate and get things done judiciously, I look at some guys who are ex-military, ex-army, ex-nave or ex-Airforce…they manage very well". Another manager of group 2 says – "I have seen candidates from different backgrounds – education, industry. We take them basis their capabilities, experience and if they don't fit here, we try out for some other dept. This flexibility and openness to varied perspectives indicates 'less rigidity' in their processes, which seems to be contributing positively to controlling biases in the organization.

Theme - 5

Hiring manager's perceptions that reflect safety concerns for women and not gender bias

This theme responds to both the first and second research questions. Hiring manager perception is one of the organizational elements which plays a significant role in shaping culture fitment based hiring processes. Also, the theme reveals the absence of any gender bias in the organization and this is something that contributes towards inclusivity in the organization. This theme is supported by three categories: Hiring manager's approach and apprehensions on female recruitment, Strong managerial support for female employees and Absence of gender discrimination are the categories grouped under this theme.

Hiring manager's approach and apprehensions on female recruitment

Most of the respondents in group 1 had described the job profile which included travel in rural areas as "difficult task for females". They also seemed to think that sales and collections would be difficult for female employees to handle, not because they considered female employees any less capable or inferior to male employees, but because they were concerned for the safety of the female employees. In the words of one of the hiring panel members – "We are trying to recruit more women, but when it comes to field jobs, they are somewhere hesitant to join. They seem to prefer sitting in the office and scrutinizing the documents. We would like to have more women. If you see collections, we are now taking in more females for field collections and even operations. We have many women branch managers also who are doing very well in the industry. We don't have any gender issues here…whoever comes forward to take up the role, we are okay to have them on board". These words of the hiring manager indicate the fact that these managers are totally open and welcoming of female candidates. One of the respondents, also a member of the hiring panel says: "The boys always call me and says – Sir, today we are sitting late and there is only one lady staff who needs to stay back ….so do we ask her to stay back or - I said it's up to you guys. If she is ok, she can stay back, otherwise let her go home. So, as you can see, we are always careful and very responsible and take care of each other." This indicates the mindset of these managers wherein they are more than happy to treat and consider women employees the same way as the male employees in the organization, with no special considerations, provided the female employees are also willing to undertake such roles and responsibilities.

Again, in the words of another hiring panel member – "We do think that desk jobs are better for women only because in the field it is little difficult. You must go to the field and meet the customers. And sometimes, these customers may not be in a good condition! They could be in an inebriated state and all that also becomes risky for us. These are rural customers we are talking about. They are not sophisticated nor even polite. But, if the women candidate is willing to take it up, we are more than fine. If we find them capable, we are more than happy to give them the role. But, if they have any hesitation, we understand that too from their end." This approach of the hiring manager clearly reflects respect for women, appreciation for their skills and capabilities and concern for their safety. It again reflects the lack of any discrimination in hiring female candidates for even field jobs, if the candidates themselves are comfortable with the idea.

Talking about hiring manager perception, apart from gender diversity, which has strong support and encouragement, the study has revealed that socio economic diversity is also supported in the hiring processes. While hiring they give more importance to the candidate's family back ground than whether he/she is highly qualified. Even candidates who had discontinued their education due to some genuine reasons were not considered inferior or less capable in any manner by the hiring manager. In fact, the hiring manager verified the gaps in the candidate's educational back ground and if reasons were genuine and justifiable, ignored these gaps. The organization believed that knowledge, skills and abilities could always be trained and developed even at a later stage in potential candidates. Again, the candidate's respect for his family was considered a benchmark by the hiring manager for assessing the respect he would have for the organization in future. Here the hiring managers seem to be giving more importance to the social attributes of the candidate than the personal attributes. Another perception upheld by the hiring manager was that the candidate would be able to adapt better and faster to rural culture than adapting to a fancy cultural set up. Perhaps it is this perception that prompted many of the managers to feel more comfortable hiring candidates from a rural or semi urban back ground at the junior levels in the organization, especially since they were dealing with a rural product. This keenness to recruit internally as well as through referrals which has helped to sustain the 'family culture' works in favor of female employees as the respect as well as security they feel here is very high.

Absence of gender discrimination

This category also supports the theme 'Hiring manager perceptions that reflect safety concerns for women and no gender bias'. The interview transcripts reveal that in no way did the managers belittle or display any differentiation or discrimination towards the female candidates through their words or actions. Besides, many of the respondents have vehemently stated that there was "absence of any discrimination" in the organization. In the words of an HR team member and hiring panel member, - "I never keep any biases…. always go by the data, what the system says, what the target is and based on that I view people – whether they are capable or not to handle that position. Even while giving an increment, I see what the target is and what was the employee achievement and whether it has matched the target or not. Same when it comes to promotions, we look at the capability of the candidate…. that's it." Similar thoughts and sentiments were echoed by the other senior panel members as well as HR team members. Another senior member of the hiring panel says: "I always ask the teams to make sure that at least one lady staff is in the branch for sure as I feel that kind of creates more culture, more discipline. Where ever there is a lady staff in the branch level or regional level or territory level there is always a good working atmosphere. I feel they are more systematic". It is interesting to note that these managers are in favor of female employees and consider them a strong asset to the organization at all levels.

Again, another respondent an HR team member and hiring panel members says – "In our company, stakeholders never say that this is only for men or this is only for women. But generally, we interview everyone and we take the best fit." Another HR team member and hiring panel member says - "I am an HR guy. I have few colleagues who are women in my team who are travelling better than me! In fact, we have a unisex washroom. We are taking more steps to completely step-up female hiring in all fields." These words indicate that the management is quite progressive in their approach and outlook towards female hiring. Some of the codes grouped under this category are - "not indulge in gender discrimination," "capability important irrespective of gender," "never show discrimination," absence of gender discrimination, "biases not there" etc.

Strong managerial support and consideration for female employees

'Strong managerial support for female employees' is another category under this theme. According to one of the hiring panel members - "We are planning to come up with a completely women managed branch …. all employees from manager to executive, a woman will be there involved. In one branch we are planning that. In our company, in my state and my business, stakeholders never say that this is only for women, this is only for men. But generally, we go and we interview everyone and we take the best fit." These words clearly indicate the strong support female employees enjoy and relish as well as the absence of any gender discrimination in the organization. The interviews revealed that even in sales and collections, if the female employee/candidate is open to and confident about taking up such roles and not reluctant, the management is supportive and would offer such a job profile to female candidates. In the words of another senior HR team member – "we hire women in all designations – field, collections, credit, system, HR…what not…you name it. It's the real time of diversity wherein we are not interested in hiring based on gender. In fact, we have women lawyers too. A very tough job that even guys would find difficult We have women casually handling." The managers are also extremely supportive in handling any customer issues. This is reflected in

the words of the of the managers who says – "Working in the rural market would warrant interactions with rural customers who could be difficult to handle at times, leading to unpleasant situations We are always there to help out here."

In fact, the managers were highly appreciative of female talent and speaks highly of their capabilities. According to one of the hiring panel members - "Women do not stagger. They come in and they close in on time. If it is a guy who has the same experience, time wastage will always be on the higher side. They go for lunch. Bio brakes, cigarette breaks…and all kinds of brakes! For female employees, breaks are lesser and their productivity exactly matches our requirements." Another HR team member very proudly narrated how they are in fact actively trying to bring in more female employees. In his words – "We have consciously gone to a lady's college; a law college and we have recruited ladies some four years back and they are still with us. These are all legal officers. We have always made conscious efforts to reach out to such colleges, especially this one." Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are – "conscious efforts for diverse workforce", management sensitive to female safety, conducive environment for women, respect for women employees, high regard for female employee capabilities etc.

All these categories have contributed towards the theme 'Hiring manager's perceptions that reflect safety concerns for women and not gender bias.' The interview excerpts indicate the absence of any gender bias in the organization. Few managers seem to be apprehensive about hiring women for certain roles, especially for field jobs because of travel and safety concerns. Even these few managers seem to be perfectly fine to go ahead and recruit capable female candidates, if the candidate themselves are keen to take up such job profiles. Interviews revealed that many of the candidates themselves hesitate to take up such job profiles even though the managers are very encouraging. So, the hiring managers are quite open to hiring female candidates for such roles if the candidates themselves are for it. Hence, this study also cannot not agree with the hiring managers stating that there is no gender discrimination in the organization.

Theme 6

Combination of Transformative and Participative leadership style complementing the hiring process

Participative and Transformational leadership style

One of the major categories under theme five, a combination of transformative and participative leadership style is reflected throughout the organization which seems to support the hiring process where the focus is more on the values or attributes of the candidate Employers open to feedback, employee participation in decision making, enhancing employee's sense of ownership of work, collaboration, open communication, high employee engagement are all some of the features of a Participative style of leadership which has been observed in Case A. For instance, in the words of a Senior HR professional – "We will ask candidates if they have read about company and what they feel about it…. what are their thoughts on the company's mission…are we really making a difference…things like that. Their opinions matter to us". This clearly indicates the employer being open to feedback as well as the encouragement that is given to the employees to actively participate in the decision-making processes. Good communication is yet another element of Participative leadership. The managers believed in open discussions and collective decisions. They ensured

that the family culture improved the self-efficacy of the employee and ensured their psychological security – all signs of a Participative leadership style.

One of the drawbacks of this type of leadership is that it might reduce efficiency, which is being mentioned by one of the HR team members. According to this respondent – "There is one issue …all this family culture can lead to slight laziness at times. I wouldn't want to go into that now". Again, high employee commitment and stability, which is also a sign of participative leadership style is reflected in the words of this HR team member and hiring panel member – "Not 11 years….11 is going to end in another 1 month (smiling). Stepping
into my 12th year now". According to a senior HR professional, a group 2 participant – "The mission and vision and all is not just written on the walls here…it is there in us! We feel so much at home here…and we all feel we've been born and brought up together". This indicates a certain 'sense of ownership' which is another feature of participative leadership style. "Management open to employee feedback", "good bond and interaction", "understanding employee problems", "collectively working towards solutions", open to explore diverse candidate perspectives, transparent and effective communication, absence of micromanagement, absence of red tapism are all some of the codes grouped under this category.

Signs of a Transformational leadership could also be seen in these managers. According to one of the hiring panel members, - "we have started hiring women in all designations, even in collections, field, credit and what not …. you name it. We are keen to promote diversity and we are even thinking of opening a branch exclusively managed and run only by women employees. This is an initiative that we plan to implement soon." All these words reflect a mindset and efforts on the part of the managers to find new ways to motivate, inspire and empower the female employees in the organization and simultaneously add value to customer centric business strategy by investing in the soft skills of these female employees. Again, passion, inspiration, signs of a visionary …all seem to be reflecting in the organization's goal to 'serve the underserved' with a "passion" or "fire in the belly." According to an HR panel member, - "This business can connect you to the transformation a customer undergoes…. the benefit the customer achieves by the business you do. That is more soul stirring than the feeling you get when you earn lakhs or whatever of your salary." These words indicate a deep-rooted passion and aspiration that the manager shares with the employees in the organization. Again, the strong relationship the managers seem to enjoy with the employees is reflected in the unconditional support they provide to the employees during times of personal and professional crisis. One of the hiring panel members and HR team member says – "if there is something that happens to an employee, the organization stands with them." Work satisfaction by transforming customer lives," "alternate thinking by management," "Supportive of initiatives to promote gender diversity," "open to better sourcing strategies", "holistic approach to tackle nonperformance" etc are some of the other codes grouped under this category.

Manager attributes

Much of the attributes of the manager as revealed through the interviews by the respondents, support this combination of Participative and transformational leadership style. Some of the codes under this category are - Empathy, " ability to understand nuances of rural folks challenges", "ability to work on feedback",

"respect for employees", respect for customers, effective communication skills, transparent and effective communication, "ability to understand different candidate perspectives", good collaboration skills, good interpersonal skills, team work ability, "connect with people", "humanistic approach", "continuous engagement at every level", "constant touch with people", "team spirit", "team bonding" etc are all some of the codes under the category 'manager attributes' which reflect or support either a transformational or a participatory leadership style.

Candidate attributes

Like the above, some of the attributes of the candidate as mentioned by the manger, reflects and complement the managers style of leadership. These attributes have been grouped under one umbrella category – candidate attributes. These codes are – " ability to empathize rural hardships", "passion or fire in the belly", "make a difference in rural lives", "commitment towards growth", "candidate views align with organization's goals", integrity, "attitude of commitment", "self-motivated", high motivation, commitment and loyalty, "drive to attain organizational goals", "passion to promote rural products", "self-starter", "passion to work for rural folks", trustworthy, "core values imbibed in him", "ability to handle chaotic situations", "seva bhavna", collaboration skills, humanistic approach, good communication skills, problem solving skills, persuasion skills, good interpersonal skills, people management skills, "ability to handle crisis", "emotional connection", "knowing someone's pain, "connect with people" etc. are some of the codes.

Both the manager and candidate attributes reflect those values that would typically be expected in an organization having a mix of transformational and participative leadership styles. They support and complement each other.

Theme 7

Candidate perceptions as per hiring managers that reveal minimal apprehensions and hardly any mismatch of expectations

This theme responds to the second research question wherein the researcher aims to explore the impact of culture fitment-based hiring on the female candidates and how it shapes gender inclusivity in organizations. The two categories that are grouped under this theme are Candidate perceptions as per hiring managers and Candidate expectations.

Candidate perceptions as per hiring managers

The experiences that mold the perceptions of the candidate regarding the organization very clearly reflect in the words of this hiring panel member, who narrated his own experience as a candidate many years before. A very interesting insight, this has been brought out as one of the themes as it reflects the mindset of the majority of the candidates at the time of joining the organization. This also seems to be one of the major reasons for these candidates' long tenure in the organization.

According to this hiring panel member, quite a senior person with many years of experience – "When I joined Mahindra in 2003, I only looked at the brand name which is very good. The organization is very good and I kept on working. I got good freedom, flexibility and built many good relationships. Humanity is very high here. There is a human touch in all interactions and everybody takes care of everyone. Nobody asks me where I am or what I am…. they only ask what is your target and what have you achieved…are you happy or not? That is the Mahindra I know." These words reflect high levels of passion the respondent had for his organization and work. The respondent continued – "It's not that I am not getting other offers', I am getting other offers, even some of them willing to pay me more. But that extra money is not going to give me the confidence, comfort, satisfaction, and happiness I am getting here." These words clearly reveal that the respondents hardly had any apprehensions as a candidate (other than few of them, regarding travel in rural areas). These employees even after many years continue to embrace similar sentiments. The managers were always transparent with the candidates on their requirements. Another hiring panel member also says – "We have a brand visibility which is of great advantage to us (he smiles). So, people like to work for us. They always come in with great expectations, but we ensure to brief them to the best extent possible about their job profile."

So, these excerpts indicate that candidates generally were less apprehensive about applying and accepting any position in the organization as they were rest assured that an organization with such a good brand name would obviously take good care of them. "Travel difficult in rural areas", "good brand name", attractive brand name", "managers from premier institutes intimidating" etc are some of the codes grouped under this category.

Candidate expectations

The interviews reveal that instances of any mismatch of candidate's expectations are minimal. One of the HR team members narrated one such incident. According to him – "Once a person joined us and he left within three days. I asked him what happened and his reason was very funny. He said that there is a lot of travel and as a result his complexion was becoming tanned! I realized that I might not have given him a detailed description of his job profile. After that I have always been extremely careful to ensure I give a detailed description to all the candidates. Such an incident has not happened again." Unrealistic candidate expectations, Unrealistic expectations based on brand name, "expectation is different", "reality is different", mismatched expectations due to ineffective communication etc are some of the codes grouped under this category.

Theme 8

Conducive and supportive work environment for female employees in the organization

This theme responds to the second research question on women candidates' experiences as well as gender inclusivity in organizations where culture fitment-based hiring is indulged in. The categories that are grouped under this theme are Low female attrition, Strong managerial support for female employees and Employee motivational factors.

Low female attrition

The interviews revealed very low attrition rates for female employees which is a clear indication of the conducive environment and high gender inclusivity in the organization. According to one of the hiring panel members who is also an HR team member – "If I hire 10 women, only one person will resign and nine people will continue to work with me in the organization. I normally see in any other company, the nine would probably quit and only one would continue to work! Here, people want to stick, they want to perform and they want to grow. In fact, attrition rates might be around 10% lesser for women employees than men." These words indicate that the attrition rates for females is very low in the organization. Another respondent, also a senior hiring panel member says – "The attrition in men is higher than in women because, other than 2 or 3, all my female employees who have joined me are still with me. And if the employee crosses the first 6 months, he/she will remain for the next 5-6 years for sure. The highest attrition always happens in the first three months. This clearly reflects the high satisfaction and commitment levels of the female employees in the organization. Another respondent, an HR team member commented – "female attrition is very low…. yes, very low. Only the marriage thing is there that at times becomes a problem for them." These sentiments are echoed in all the participant responses. Another respondent who is a. hiring panel member added – "female employees are always with this organization for a longer run. They love to work here because we have given them that kind of confidence that this is their family and that there is no need to worry as the organization is always with them." All this indicates that there is a high level of trust and bonding between the employees in the organization. Also, it suggests that the 'family culture' could be one of the major reasons for women not leaving the organization. According to one of the senior hiring panel members and HR team member, - "women employees stay longer in fact, they do not leave us …their attrition rates are very low. I would say our 'family culture' motivates us …the closeness, the respect, the trust …. is there between people." Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are "female employee exits for personal reasons," "longer tenure for females than males", "female exits hardly happen", low female attrition, "attrition higher for men", "most exits due to marriage " etc.

Strong managerial support for female candidates

The second category under the theme, Conducive and supportive work environment for female employees in the organization, is the 'Strong managerial support for female candidates' that is there in the organization. According to one of the senior hiring panel members and HR team member, - "people stick, they want to slog, perform, and grow. Women employees stay longer in fact, they do not leave us …their attrition rates are very low. I would say our 'family culture' motivates us …the closeness is there between people. We are growing together as a family, facing challenges together …whether towards performance or non-performance." These words indicate the positive impact 'family-oriented culture' has had on the employees, especially the female employees. A strong sense of security and mutual respect is there because of this culture, which is a motivator for the female work force. This is further confirmed by the group 2 respondents which is mentioned in the latter part of this chapter.

Interviews also revealed that the management is extremely considerate and sensitive to the needs of the employee. In the words of a hiring panel member, - "If the employee has done well, we would appreciate him in front of all. If he is not doing well, we will not insult him or do his review in front of others. Rather, we will ensure that we call him/her separately and do the needful." Again, another factor is the absence of any gender discrimination. This is clearly revealed in the words of hiring panel member who is also an HR team member, when he says – "Me or my team has never discriminated between gender at any point of time.

At our level, whenever we have an opportunity, we have always only tried to promote more women. In fact, we even have plans to open a branch where everyone including the branch manager is a lady." These words indicate that the managers are not only open to promoting more women, but they also intend to take initiatives that could act as a source of inspiration to the female employees and others too. Again, another respondent also a senior hiring panel member says – "I always ask the teams that at least one lady staff must be there in each branch for sure …. I feel it creates more culture, more discipline. With women in the work force, there is always a good working atmosphere, I feel…they tend to be more systematic." These words clearly reveal how strongly inclined the managers are to have more women in the workforce. The respondent went on to narrate an incident where he got a call once from his team member asking him whether it was alright to make a female staff stay back for longer hours to complete a project they were working on, to which the manager replied – "It's up to you guys. If she is okay, she can stay…she wants to go home, please tell her she can go home. If something goes wrong, we are responsible. So, please be careful and always take care of each other." This support and encouragement play a major role in the low female attrition reported here, despite the roles that require travel in rural areas. The feeling of security is immense for these female employees. Besides, these managers had immense respect and confidence in the female employees in the organization.

The other respondents also had similar stories to narrate and echoed similar sentiments. Some of the codes under this category which highlight the conducive and supportive work environment for women employees are "conscious effort for diverse workforce", management sensitive to female employee safety, females employed in senior management roles, growth opportunities for female employees, absence of gender bias, "current female managers performing well", high regard for female employee capabilities, "strict consequences for managers indulging in gender bias", "steps for increasing female staff in sales", better infrastructure for female employees, "support gender diversity", "need to hire women", "respect for women employees" etc.

Employee motivational factors

Motivational factors for all employees have played a major role in lowering female attrition and ensuring a conducive environment for not only female employees, but also, for all the employees in the organization. According to a senior hiring panel member, "there is a lot of respect for women employees here. This is not an organization…it is a 'family' organization. I go to each employee and ask them if they have any issues – professional or personal. I tell them you can speak to me like a younger or elder brother. This gives them the confidence that someone is there to handhold them." These few words itself clearly indicate that 'family culture' is primarily responsible for motivating the employees. The personal rapport, respect, bonding, support, empathy …. all reflect in the words of the respondent. The respondent added – "if you give them freedom, they will express correctly. If you don't give them freedom, they don't express." This indicates the absence of micromanagement in the organization. Another respondent says – "bonding, family culture, appreciation to employees…. that's the reason the company has gone into the 'great place to work". Again, another respondent, also a senior HR team member says – "I'll call this a big start up. You have the liberty to innovate. Try nonsense…. if it works, the credit will be given to you. If it doesn't, they'll still protect your back…. but you need to inform them." The researcher realized that unconditional support for growth is something in the organization that is acting as a huge motivator.

Again, another respondent, also an HR team member of group 2 says: - "the business model is such that it encourages convenience of work. We have here a kind of integration of hybrid and a flexible workplace, especially at the field level jobs. This has its plus points as it makes working in these rural areas easier and there is work life integration." Here, despite work life balance not totally being there in the field level jobs, employees still lasted through such jobs because of the concepts like flexibility, convenience, absence of micromanagement etc associated to the concept of work life integration. Above all, the respondent adds: "Basically, I get a lot of satisfaction….and some kind of happiness. I guess when you deal with people that are simple, this satisfaction and happiness is only natural". The study reveals that handling a rural product has its unique set of advantages. This satisfaction and happiness were responsible for employees continuing in the organization despite the modest pay scale. Towards the end of the interview, the topic of exit interviews came up. One of the respondents, a senior hiring panel member commented, - "If any good employee is leaving by any chance and he has given some remarks, then we will definitely need to look into those remarks and we need to correct ourselves, that is very important." This and many other such similar thoughts shared in the interviews indicate the prevalence of a participative style of leadership which also acts a huge motivational factor for all employees. the management is willing to take feedback, analyses their actions and make corrections if required. These words reveal that the management is not resistant to change and is willing to take constructive feedback.

Interviews had many more similar narrations and comments, all which reflect similar sentiments. These motivational factors, strong senior management support and low female attrition all clearly indicate the need to formulate the theme – 'Conducive and supportive work environment for female employees in the organization'. Some of the codes under this category are- "continuous engagement of management with employees", "regular connect with employees", management supportive in personal and professional crisis, "strong moral support from management", informal and friendly approach, stability and commitment of senior management, "great benefits despite modest pay", "work satisfaction", " prompt recognitions", "beautiful benefits", "meaningful tokens of appreciation", "apolitical organization", "management's personal connect with employees", absence of micromanagement, "timely promotion motivating", "respect for female staff", "family culture" etc. .

Theme 9

Challenges in culture fitment hiring

Challenges posed by candidate

The interviews revealed some very interesting realities which are also quite amusing. According to a senior hiring panel member, - "Sometimes, even the employee himself/herself does not know whether he is having the particular value." To further explain, the respondent continues – "for example, I am hiring a guy for a field level role from the village. He has no idea what is customer centricity! He might fit otherwise, but this will be something we will have to nurture over time….and that is sometimes not very easy." Again, the respondent continued – "Sometimes when we hire through a reference, the family might be high on integrity. But, the candidate, we realize later is not exactly having that value…. These are rare instances, but, yes, they do happen sometimes." The respondent emphasized the fact that all these challenges are at times unavoidable and was glad that they were "rare instances." Another respondent who is an HR team member says - "They do not change their perspectives on the changing world or according to the changing dynamics of the business. So, then it becomes difficult. Nothing can be done in one shot and we need continuous team

meetings, town halls etc to explain and move ahead." Unrealistic candidate expectations, Expectations based on brand name, High expectations, mismatch between candidate values and family values, candidate resistant to changes, rigid perspectives of candidate, "clueless about reality", "expectations different", "reluctant female candidates" etc are some of the codes that are grouped under this category.

Challenges posed by the rural market

One of the respondents, a hiring panel member says – "Women candidates are sometimes reluctant to take on roles that have travel…especially travel in rural areas. We are always open if they are willing…but, I guess at times they do have personal challenges too. There are many who come forward willingly also. But at times, we feel we miss out on good potential because of this aspect." Another respondent, an HR team member says: - "At times the rural customers are difficult to handle. They can even be in an inebriated state which is highly demotivating and challenging to the female employee who is on a field job. Such situations are challenging and we need to be careful when we take in female candidates for field jobs, especially when they themselves are hesitant. These are all rare cases …but, yes, such incidents do sometimes happen." Another respondent added – "Again, at times, the recruit, in a field job, exits even before they complete 6 months if they find a job with better pay. They refuse to give themselves time to get to know the organization well." Absence of regular earning patterns in rural customers, absence of documentation in rural customers, "female candidates reluctant to travel in rural areas", "women hesitant to travel in rural areas", "fewer female employees for rural market", "difficult to handle rude rural customers", "crude customer behavior", moderate pay scale for field level employees for first 6 months" etc. are some of the codes that are grouped under this category.

4.3 Themes and Categories (Group 2)

Group 2 consists of six female employees - three female employees who have been hired recently, i.e.; completed at least three months but not exceeding one year and three female employees who have undergone promotion interviews or have had promotions in the organization. Below, the various themes as well as the categories that have contributed to formulating the themes are explained.

Theme 1

Shared mission and cognitive diversity facilitating bias free culture fitment-based hiring

One of the major themes discovered as a part of the research-based findings in group 2 is the significance interviewers attach to the organization's mission and encouraging cognitive diversity in hiring. This theme is in response to the first research question on the various organizational elements that shape culture fitment based hiring processes, and their role in assessing women candidates. The major categories supporting this theme are: Shared mission of the company based on founders' values, valuing different thought patterns and mental perspectives, hiring from different backgrounds especially at middle and senior levels and Female candidates interview experiences.

Shared mission of the company based on Founders' values

One of the categories that support this theme is: Shared mission of the company based on founders' values. The hiring process prioritizes the shared mission of the organization and this is reflected throughout the interview. According to the respondents, the interviewers had asked questions on the candidate's - "ability to work and interact with the rural people", whether they would be "capable to survive in the rural market", whether candidate had had to "show empathy in any of the previous jobs", had "to find out the pain point of the customer", "he/she is well aware of his/her goals", "whether the goals are aligned to the organizational values and goals" and so on. Here, the interviewers are assessing the candidate's passion for the job, level of empathy etc which are all crucial for 'transforming the rural lives through Seva Bhavna' (Founders values). Again, one of the candidates herself has mentioned that "culture is ingrained in the organization's DNA" and this "culture is a top-down thing." Again, another respondent who is a fresh recruit says- "This is not a culture you see in most places which have just started working. This is something that comes because the organization has had it in its DNA since a long time and it comes as a top-down thing. It must be Mr. M driving it for so many years! Only then it can happen…and that's why you hear such consistent reviews from all our branches in any part of the country." These words of the respondent reveal the extent to which even the fresh recruit believes in the role of founder's value/mission in shaping the culture of the organization. Some of the codes under this category are - "culture a top down thing", "culture coming from the top", "culture ingrained in organization's DNA", "all coming from the founder".

Valuing different thought patterns and mental perspectives (Cognitive diversity)

The second category is 'Valuing different thought patterns and mental perspectives. This speaks about the cognitive diversity that is encouraged during the hiring process. This is reflected in the candidate's words – "how I feel about the company," "do I think the company is making a difference", "healthy discussions during interview process, "discussing the way ahead", "exchanging thoughts", "two-way conversations", "encouraged to speak out on any issue". All these clearly reflect effort by the interviewer to understand the candidate's ideas and perspectives on several aspects. This researcher feels that this promotion of cognitive diversity helps to sustain a bias free culture in the organization. The management is always trying to bring in different ideas and perspectives through their candidates/employees which is made possible through hiring from varied backgrounds at the middle and senior levels. This acts in favor of female candidates also during hiring as their perspectives and ideas are highly valued by the management. All this helps in creating a bias free culture fitment-based hiring process. Some of the codes under this category are –"how I feel about the company", "is company making a difference", "how you feel", "healthy discussions", "discussing the way ahead", :exchanging thoughts", "two way conversation", encouraged to speak out, "can always share thoughts", exchange of views, "discuss everything etc.

Candidates hired from varying backgrounds especially at middle and senior levels (Cognitive diversity)

The third category is Candidates hired from different backgrounds at middle and senior levels. This is also a factor that promotes cognitive diversity in hiring. According to one of the candidates- "we do hire people who don't have a housing background. There are no hard and fast rules that you should have a housing background, then only the company will take you. We even have employees with an army background in the middle and senior levels." Again, another respondent, who is has undergone promotions in the organization, is a part of many interview panels and is a group 2 participant, spoke on tapping new channels of hiring. In her words - "something the company has been doing the last few years – tapping new channels

of hiring. Customer kin came up….team lease came up. I think if we want to continue to be relevant, we can't only depend on referral. Referral is very strong, but we need to constantly have new sources of hiring…. maybe explore gig workers, which is such a big thing now." These words of the respondent not only highlight the significance the organization is imparting to hiring from varied work backgrounds, it also highlights the aspect of entertaining and encouraging cognitive diversity amongst the candidates as well as employees in the organization. Some of the codes under this category are – "candidates without housing backgrounds," "no hard and fast rule in hiring", "flexibility in hiring", "previous work experience not mandatory", "no rigid mindsets while hiring", "candidates with all types of profiles", "even people with military background", "varied sources of hiring" etc.

Female candidate's interview experiences

The fourth category supporting this theme is the 'Female candidate's interview experiences. The codes that fall under this category helps to reconfirm the significance of 'shared mission' and 'cognitive diversity' in the organization's culture fitment based hiring process. All the respondents unanimously stressed on the relevance the interviewers attached to understanding and assessing the candidate's personal background, their values, beliefs etc through "easy and personal questions." According to them, the interview process was more like a "healthy discussion" or an 'informal chat" wherein the interviewers ensured the candidate was at ease throughout the interview. In the respondents' words: "personal related questions," "healthy discussions", HR keen to know basic things", "role related questions", "no bias, but healthy discussions", "honest and frank communication" - all indicate efforts on the part of the interviewers to assess the candidate values and having the 'organizational values based on the organization's mission' as a benchmark.

The interviewers place significant emphasis on the organization's core values and principles that originate from the mission, throughout the hiring process. The mission advocates for values and principles that challenge conventional thinking and innovatively use resources to bring about a positive change in the lives of the stakeholders and communities, thus enabling them to 'Rise.' The 'Rise' philosophy which is all about ambition, right attitude, positivity, passion, and alternative thinking that could challenge the status quo is tightly embraced by the management and reflects throughout the hiring process, especially while assessing 'fitment' of the candidate. Entrepreneurship, Integrity, Teamwork, Risk mitigation and Customer centricity are the core values of the organization. The interviews reveal that values and beliefs of the candidates which are assessed through the interview questions are mapped back to the company's mission. The management wants their employees to be united by the organization's shared mission, but have cognitive diversity – (different political beliefs, varying backgrounds), pushing the employees to avoid group think and bias and thus build up the core of the organization's culture. Thus this 'shared mission' and 'cognitive diversity' shapes the culture fitment-based hiring in such a way that bias is negligible in the hiring process. The need for different thought patterns and mental perspectives acts in favor of the female candidates and the shared mission facilitates uniting the entire work force.

Theme 2

Internal and external negotiators enabling female candidates/employees to overcome travel related apprehensions

This theme responds to the research question wherein the experiences of women employees are focused upon. The categories that are grouped together to formulate this theme are: Employee motivational factors, Management support for female candidates/employees, Family support for female employees and Culture shift in women wanting to embrace learning and growth. All these categories focus on factors that motivate and support the female candidates/employees to overcome travel related apprehensions.

Employee motivational factors

According to the respondents, the various motivational factors include, job satisfaction, equal opportunities, "very approachable senior management", "good learning opportunities", flexible working hours, "shifts to ensure smooth working for female employees after maternity leave", "company being a leader in the market", "company having good market reputation", brand name, apolitical organization, "beautiful benefits", "stable and super tenured leadership team", "thoughtful and caring concepts", "respect given to women", "absence of gender discrimination", "females in senior managerial inspiring roles, management's confidence in the employee, timely promotions, learning opportunities, and the list goes on. According to the respondents, these motivational factors have always enabled the candidates as well as the employees to overlook one of the major challenges hurled against them - travel in the rural areas. These motivational factors stem from the culture in the organization which embraces passion, respect, empathy, integrity, teamwork, service mentality, growth-oriented outlook, family culture etc.

Management's support for employees/female candidates

The second category, Management's support for female candidates is a sub category of 'Employee motivational factors', but needs to be highlighted equally as it forms a very crucial part of the internal factors responsible for negotiating amicably the challenges - travel and other minor challenges faced by female candidates and employees. In the words of one of the respondents who is a fresh recruit, - "I will never think of leaving this company because we are given equal opportunities. I have never felt that I am a female or anything. Our bosses are so supportive. The HR head is so supportive. Even if I have a problem, you won't believe, I can go to the MD and discuss with him. It's not like you can't go to any higher up." These words of the respondent who herself was a recent recruit into the organization, speaks volumes about the kind of support the female employees received from the management. Another respondent who is also a fresh recruit says, "we have been encouraged to speak, whatever, and if they find it okay, they will implement it." Again, another respondent who had undergone promotions in the organization says- "Management assured me that the learning curve here would be something I would be able to take if I wanted to and that was something which was also very good. In the sense, it was motivational." All these speak volumes about the extent of managerial support that was there for the female employees. Flexible work hours , Timely promotions, "constant and regular interactions with the senior management", "incapability managed without belittling the candidate", "managers like good friends", "compassionate and supportive management", management ensuring equal opportunities, growth opportunities for female employees, "not ever felt any bias"….all

these and more indicate strong support and encouragement from the management which plays a significant role in enabling the female candidates and employees to overcome their apprehensions at the time of joining and later.

Family support for female employees

The third category- 'Family support for female employees' which is an external negotiator, plays a crucial role and has contributed towards making the career choice and in smoothening the career progression of the female employees. As one the respondents says - "My mother was initially very doubtful. But now her perception has changed…. she doesn't want me to leave the company! Earlier she wasn't letting me because of travel and all that, but now she is like -no, you don't leave this place…its very safe for females. After marriage, my husband is also saying the same thing. So, the kind of support I get from my mama and mother-in-law and husband…. everyone is so comfortable. Now I tell them I will get good package and all in another company, but they don't want me to leave this place!" (laughs). These words clearly bring out the positive role that family support can have and how it has encouraged the respondent to deal with her challenges at any point of time. Such sentiments were echoed by many other respondents too. Some of the codes under this category are – "mother's perception changed," "support from my family," "don't leave this place", "everyone so comfortable", "family doesn't want me to leave", "should continue here only", "everyone so comfortable", family support…etc.

Culture shift in women wanting to embrace learning and growth

The fourth category is 'Culture shift in women wanting to embrace learning and growth.' The words of the respondents reveal that there is a shift that has happened over the years in the thought processes and attitudes of women with respect to their work life, work life balance, and what they perceive as their duties or responsibilities. They are more aware of the importance of valuing themselves, their aspirations, and dreams. As one of the respondents has said: "One thing I know is I would definitely like to keep doing better things and learning more. I would like to have the freedom as well as the opportunity to reach higher things or higher goals. I would like to do things which are of more value and which would give me a good feeling about myself and this is one such place which will give me lots of opportunities." "Learning wise good", "opportunities for self-development and growth", "such a good feeling to work for the benefit of rural people", "a place that gives me a lot of opportunities", "like to reach higher things", "job satisfaction over and above any challenges", passion for learning, passion for service – are all some of the codes under this category that clearly reveal an urge to learn new thigs, to feel satisfied and content doing things that they consider close to their heart and moving ahead in the direction of better opportunities, awareness and growth. This change or shift in the outlook of women from the earlier approach which was more about being a good homemaker, doing things only for the family to the new age woman who values herself too and believes in pursuing her goals and dreams also, seems to be one of the most important factors that have acted as an external negotiator in overcoming much of the female candidate's apprehensions.

Theme 3

Gender sensitive culture – A major facilitator for gender inclusivity in the organization

Another major theme that was discovered based on the research findings is the prevalence of a gender sensitive culture in the organization. The categories supporting the theme are - Management support for female candidates /employees, Family culture fostering good bonding and job satisfaction and Absence of discrimination based on gender.

Management support for female candidates/employees

Management support for female candidates is obvious right from the time of hiring in the organization. In fact, the fact that the senior management team consisted of many females is itself proof of the fact that management is extremely enthusiastic towards selecting and promoting female candidates. As mentioned before, the codes indicate that management support is reflected in the flexible work hours, timely promotions, "interdepartmental transfers to promote growth", "encouragement to speak out any issue", cooperative HR, supportive HR, compassionate HR, "HR trying to recruit more females", "management very much concerned about employee welfare", "Management giving equal opportunities", "facilitating learning and growth of female employees" and so on. According to one of the female respondents who is also a fresh recruit - "If we want to go to another department also, they will never say no, but they will support us. They will definitely help me because I want to learn new things. My boss always encourages me …you should speak out, he says. So, we have been encouraged to speak out whatever it is and if it is something that can be implemented, they will implement it." These words reveal the support and encouragement the employees seem to be getting from the senior management in the organization. Again, according to another respondent who has undergone promotions in the organization - "When after maternity leave when I resumed, my son, he used to wake up at 4pm or 5. So I had to get back before that. There is a shift for females, 8-4. So, I opted for that shift just to ensure that I reach home by 5:30 because he will get up and start looking for me. So that time company supported me and I am very happy." Again, another respondent, who had also undergone promotion interviews, remarked that 'teamwork' was also happening well and this was due to such strong and supportive management – "We are working like a team and in a team meeting also, we never try to pull a leg, we are always together as a team…no wedges in between." Some of the codes under this category are "regular interactions with senior management," "interdepartmental transfers to promote growth", "encouraged to speak out on any issue", "incapability managed without belittling candidate", "management sensitive to candidate", "never pull a leg", support from company, no work life balance issues, "trying to recruit more females", equal opportunities, shifts to ensure smooth working etc.

Absence of discrimination based on gender

According to one of the respondents who has undergone promotions in the organization – "We are not biased at all, in culture or in anything. I have never experienced any bias in the hiring process." Again, "In our company, I have never felt there is any biasness in male and female, I have never felt that. There is no one who says – you are female, so you will not be part of this meeting or that you will be unnecessarily

questioned or micromanaged. It has never happened to me and I don't think to anyone else either". These words clearly indicate the absence of any gender bias in the organization. Again, another respondent who had also undergone promotions in the organization, indicated the relevance of performance as a pre-requisite for promotions and said promotions had nothing to do with 'preferences' of any kind. In her words – "Our system is not bad ...like there are no preferences. If you are not the boss's favorite, you do not get promotion…. nothing like that here. You must prove yourself, what you have done in this entire year. So, if I do my best, I know where I will reach and no one
can stop me." The amount of faith and confidence the employees have in their management is evident here. The researcher feels that this faith is there as the management is in no way indulging in any bias or any unfair treatment. This also contributes immensely to creating a gender sensitive culture in the organization which in turn facilitates a gender inclusive culture in the organization. Some of the codes grouped under this category are "never felt I'm a female", equal opportunities, "everyone so comfortable", "not biased at all", absence of rigid mindsets, "never happened to me", "no mindset issues" etc.

Family culture fostering good bonding and job satisfaction

One of the factors that seem to be working well to not only creating a competitive edge in the organization but also to facilitate and promote a gender sensitive culture is the employees considering each other as a family member. This also motivates the employees to remain more committed to the organizational goals and objectives. According to one of the respondents who is a fresh recruit - "As far as my colleagues are concerned, all of us gel well and it's obvious that this company is like one big family! You will find this not just in the head office or regional offices, but all over our branches. A couple of celebrations are done together to motivate the employees. I have not faced any issues so far and I think that would be the case with everyone here. There would be some healthy competition, work related …but that's a separate thing altogether. Everyone gets along with each other well." Again, another respondent, who has undergone promotions has commented: "I would see myself growing with the organization. We are all together as a family and we can take it ahead. We also see our growth in it and are hoping for the best." This family culture reflects in their open-door policy, favorable working conditions, mentoring, respect, fondness for each other and admiration for senior members, Caring for each other and interest in the employee's personal welfare, solidarity, cooperativeness, and interdependency. This is all clearly reflecting in some of the quotes of the respondents such as - "I don't want to leave…. it's like a family here!", "14 years with one big family!" Some of the other excerpts from the interviews that reflect a family-oriented culture are – "just like a family", "feel connected as an organization", "a sense that I'm really a part of the organization", sense of ownership, "acceptance wise good", " can share workload", "always together" , team spirit, respect for women and so on. Above everything else, this seems to be working well for the female employees as mutual trust and respect are all very strong facets of this family culture in the organization, enabling and supporting gender sensitivity. Some of the codes under this category are –"like a family", "blessed to work here", " really happy", "gelling ka issue nahin", "one big family", job satisfaction etc.

Theme 4

Culture Fit – the glue that holds the organization together facilitating employee retention

In Group 2, the deductive theme, 'Culture Fit – the glue that holds the organization together facilitating employee retention', includes the categories: Interview process prioritizing culture fit, Company features

attractive for the candidate and Candidate views on early exit.

Interview process prioritizing culture fit

The organization associates significance to culture fitment during their hiring processes. This clearly highlights the significance of 'culture fitment' as an evaluation criterion in the organization. The respondents have unanimously voiced at some point or the other in their experience/s during the hiring process, especially during the interviews, where the interviewer was proactively trying to assess the 'culture fitment' aspect of the candidate. All the candidates have described the interview sessions as "not at all like an interview" and "more like a discussion" or "healthy discussion," "smooth process", "motivational discussions" etc. This clearly indicates a two-way interaction, where along with giving a fair idea of the job description, the interviewer through his questions and the respondent's responses was trying to assess the 'fitment 'aspect. Most of the respondents had gone through three rounds of interviews and according to them, the questions were a lot 'personal' also in nature. They were asked about their family backgrounds, educational backgrounds, work experience, any gaps in either educational or work life and the reasons for the same, whether they would be able to cope with travel, if any, in the rural markets, how capable they would be in handling and negotiating with the customers (especially since their customers belonged to the rural sector and could be challenging to deal with at times). According to another respondent, the aspect of 'culture fitment' is non-negotiable. The respondent even narrates instances where interdepartmental transfers have happened to accommodate a potential candidate who is a good culture fit, but lacked the required experience for a particular department. This clearly indicates the significance the management associated to culture fitment in the organization.

In one of the interviews, the candidate was asked whether she would be up to undertaking this job. The respondent describes her interview process as being "completely relaxed" and "more of a chat" where the interviewer ensured the respondent was comfortable throughout the process. This candidate was from a reputed MNC and so the interviewers wanted to be sure of their decision to hire the candidate. The interviewers were trying to understand the reason behind the candidate's decision to apply for the job – "they were trying to assess if I was taking it for the heck of it"! The interviewers had doubts on the candidate's willingness to accept the job which was having a moderate pay as against the pay she was having in her previous job. They could assess the extent of passion the candidate was having for the job by understanding the reason behind her willingness to accept a job with a lower pay. There were questions related to how good the candidate would be in communicating with the stakeholders, especially those at the bottom of the pyramid since a major part of the employees
at field levels were those that were hired locally. It was important for the management that the candidate should be able to have good communication with employees not just at the mid and senior levels, but also at the lower levels. Through the questions, the interviewer managed to get a fair idea of the candidate's beliefs, values, attitude and thus proceeded with the decision to hire. The candidate on the other hand, was concerned more about the growth opportunities, brand reputation, job satisfaction and having the opportunity to "make value

addition". This candidate had very clear expectations of her job profile and the kind of experience she would want and hardly gave importance to 'culture fitment' while applying for the job. The respondent's words, "didn't think of changing my line of work for any culture fitment," clearly supports this. According to the respondent, the onus of 'fitment' lay entirely with the organization. Any background work by the respondent

to have some understanding of the organization seem to be limited to an understanding of only the job profile. This clearly reveals how ambitious these female candidates are and how they prioritize their expectations.

The interviewer, on the other hand posed questions on the candidate's family background, past work experience, reasons for deciding to apply for the job, the factors that had attracted the candidate to apply for the post. Another candidate, a fresh recruit, describes her interview saying "it was just like a discussion". Mujhe lagaya hi nahin that he is taking my interviews"! In her words, the major questions posed were - "why you want to join this place? Because I belong to a very different organization and this is very different company…culture wise…. lot of difference. So, they wanted to know if I will accommodate easily or not. They wanted to know because in my previous organization I had like my personal cabin…here you will not get all that…so how you will feel…you will be able to work in current infrastructure or not and the kind of people you are going to interact…mostly from rural background …so we might face some challenges in terms of communication. All this because the culture would be very different …culture shift is there. Then they wanted to know what my plan was…but I had worked for a long time in my old organization. So, they understood and it was ok." Thus, according to the respondents in Group 2, the interviewers were intentionally hiring for fit. This was clearly reflecting in the kind of questions they were asking the candidates and the areas they seemed to be focusing and probing on. As the respondents had stated: "If I would be up for doing this," "If I could travel", assess empathy levels, previous customer interaction experience, family background , "our goals to be aligned to company goals", "able to work with rural people" etc. This all speaks of an organization that very clearly prioritizes culture fit in their interview process.

Company features attractive for the candidate

As the second category indicates, there are certain features of the company that played a major role in attracting the candidates to the organization and thus also contributed towards the candidate 'fitting 'into the organization. Some of these features are the growth opportunities and learning the organization could provide, the current brand reputation of the organization and the fact that work experience in such a reputed brand could add value to the candidate, the "national presence" as one candidate had described, candidate having a strong service mentality and thus having a strong liking for the kind of work she would be required to do and of course, other factors like flexible work hours, work life balance, approachable senior management etc. As one respondent, who was a fresh recruit said - "We are working in the rural market here. Tho mujhe tagline bahut pasand hai! Just think, we are serving rural Indians…and I am so proud of that. I am earning well here…working to earn for bread and butter…but above all, yes, I am doing good service…. serving fellow rural Indians…. serving Bharat (tagline)…and that is such a good feeling." So, the responses have revealed that once the initial apprehensions of the candidate are addressed, the 'passion' for service and learning enables these employees to overcome the subtler challenges. Very surprisingly, the study revealed that majority of the candidates had not even taken efforts to check out the company culture prior to joining and relied entirely on the organization to assess their fitment. Any background work by the respondent to have some understanding of the organization seem to be limited to an understanding of only the job profile. This clearly reveals how ambitious these female candidates are and how they prioritize their expectations.

Candidate views on early exits

This suggests that the reasons for early employee exits were mostly personal and had nothing to do with any critical issue in the organization. As the respondent stated, these reasons were "going somewhere else after marriage", "transfer to another", "maternity leave and then finding it "challenging to get back" etc. In fact, the respondents highlighted the fact that female attrition is very less in the organization. Once the initial apprehensions regarding travel and other safety concerns for field level jobs were satisfactorily addressed by the employers, hardly any female employee has exited the organization, other than for personal reasons. In fact, attrition was higher for male employees than female employees. According to one of the respondents - "Over here there are people who have done 7 years or 8 years with us, they are still there with us in our company. So, I don't think people leave so easily unless they have some genuine reason, mostly personal like a marriage or something or maybe a transfer. Otherwise, no one will go from this place." This clearly indicates the strong gender sensitive culture in the organization, a prime factor that contributes towards the culture fitment aspect of the organization.

4.4 Observations and reflections – A brief summary

Hiring Philosophy, mission, hiring strategy, values, founder values, hiring manager perceptions, leadership styles, business strategy, senior management's role, candidate perceptions are all organizational elements that contribute to shaping the hiring processes in the organization. Each of these elements has been brought out here in the form of themes derived from categories after coding.

Here, the case clearly reflects a family oriented organizational culture as suggested by the themes – Value based hiring philosophy and Family oriented and service-oriented culture. The hiring strategy in the organization is based on the culture in the organization. This 'culture based hiring strategy' seems to be perfectly aligned to the 'customer focussed business' strategy of the organization. As the organization is open to hiring from various sources, cognitive diversity seems to be high in the organization. One of the respondents has mentioned regarding a person from military background who got hired, mainly due to the hiring strategy focusing on values than competencies. Both the hiring strategy and business strategy is complemented by the Transformational and Participative styles of leadership which the managers seem to be following. The themes also suggest the absence of gender bias in the organization (as stated and understood from the narratives of both group 1 and group two respondents). The study suggests that even though culture fitment is given more focus in the hiring strategy here, no cases of gender bias has been reported in the organization. The shared mission and cognitive diversity could be a factor contributing to this absence of bias. The senior management support for female employees and candidates could also be one of the factors facilitating this absence of gender bias. As a result of all this, the female attrition rates seem to be very low – lower than male employees. The researcher feels that the family-oriented informal culture seems to be responsible for facilitating a bias free conducive environment for the female employees in the organization. As a result of all this, the inclusivity is also high in the organization.

The interviews indicate the absence of any gender discrimination while hiring and the narratives reflect a very supportive, encouraging, and fair environment in the organization where women employees are concerned. The only aspect which seemed to be leading to certain reluctance in the minds of some female candidates is the travel aspect (in case it is a part of their job profile), especially travel in the rural areas. Few of the managers also seemed to be slightly wary of this aspect while hiring female employees and

ensured that they made the candidates fully aware of what exactly their job profile entailed, to avoid future problems. This explains the reason for slightly lesser number of female candidates as against what could have been, in the organization. The managers are also making it very clear that if the candidate is not reluctant to take up travel in field jobs, they would be more than happy to hire them if they were a good fit in the organization. It is also clear that once selected, the female employees are treated as equals. Again, the interviews clearly reveal that these female employees continue to work in the organization for several years, until and unless they decided to leave for personal reasons (low female attrition). All this suggest the absence of any gender bias in the organization, although culture fitment-based hiring is happening here.

The interviews conducted revealed the absence of gender bias in the organization and during the hiring processes. Some of the managers did have a concern regarding rural travel as posing a challenge for some women. However, this could clearly be interpreted as genuine concern for the safety and convenience of female employees and not emerging from a discriminatory approach. These managers are also totally open to supporting and encouraging those female candidates who are willing to take up such roles without any hesitation. The study attributes this mindset of managers to mere 'concern and regard for women employees' with absolutely no linkage to gender bias. The organization seems to support gender sensitive hiring. This could be the result of the family culture the organization embraces, where a certain protective instinct for its female employees is there purely out of concern for their safety. Thus, the family culture which the organization promotes is also responsible for the absence of gender bias.

One of the interviews reveal the presence of certain notions /mindsets which the managers themselves claim as based on unproven apprehensions. The reluctance on the part of one of the managers to recruit women due to safety concerns can be seen as an example for such apprehension. The very fact that this manager himself has stated the fact that he is consciously making efforts to overcome such apprehensions and recruit more women further supports the absence of gender bias in the organization. If the hiring managers is apprehensive about a sales profile for female candidate, he is equally apprehensive about a desk job for a male candidate. The interviews reveal that the manager himself manages to curtail this subtle apprehension, and avoid it from growing out of proportion. If the hiring manager might prefer a female candidate over a male candidate for a desk job, they would be equally encouraging and supportive of female candidates for other job profiles like a sales or marketing job which requires travel.
It is also interesting to note that the diversity aspect in the org also revolves around socioeconomic diversity – this form of diversity focusses on the worker's education and financial status. The org firmly believes that a person's financial situation should not have any bearing on how he performs at work. Just because a candidate is from an affluent/wealthy background does not mean he is a good fit for a position or will necessarily perform well. The org believes in treating all employees equally and ensures a fair workplace for all its employees. The org also believes in providing their employees with the opportunities to learn and advance in their fields and better themselves. This show of faith helps to increase employee loyalty and commitment to the organization.Much against the conflicting views on gender bias being triggered or compounded by 'culture fitment in hiring', the interviews clearly reveal the absence of any gender bias. Once hired, the employees irrespective of their gender enjoy and reap benefits of high levels of inclusivity that is nurtured at all levels in the organization.

The Customer centric business strategy in the organization also stands in favor of female candidates and employees in the organization. To ensure effective customer focus and management, the employers focus on the soft skills as well as social attributes of the candidate while hiring. This falls in favor of women candidates, who are generally looked upon as possessing effective soft skills as well as social attributes.

Service mindset, empathy, interpersonal skills. effective communication skills, collaboration, and teamwork, managing unstructured chaotic situations well... are all aspects which are required to promote customer centricity. This customer centric approach which is embedded in the organizational culture is itself an enabler for creating a welcoming and conducive environment for female candidates. Customer centricity requires the employees to have soft skills as well as focus on social attributes which in turn works more in favor of the female employees. Besides, this customer centric business strategy leads to customers having an attitude of respect as well as gratitude towards the employees. This in turn motivates the employees. Thus, the customer focused business strategy also acts as a strong motivational factor for the employees. The study also suggests that a if there is perfect alignment between the business strategy and hiring strategy, culture fitment will be inevitable

Their office reflected an atmosphere of compassion and dedication wherein one would feel at home very easily. Even their walls had colorful images portraying life in the rural areas – images of community living, which kind of resonated well with the informal family-oriented culture in the organization. These were bright and colourful pictures that showed people living and working together in villages. These paintings reflected harmony, togetherness, 'seva bhavna' or service to rural folks and seemed to be a portrayal of a very simple, modest, and close-knit family culture. The essence of the organization's mission, vision and values could be captured by anyone who enters the office premises. These images would have an impact on any individual visiting or working in the organization. The employees believed in transforming lives and creating positive change through their EVP (Employee value proposition) which stressed on viewing growth as a way of life, empowering employees, where people mattered more than anything else, where the company saw only possibilities in place of problems and where they believed in alternative thinking that would drive positive change. The office reflected an environment bent on creating and fostering inclusion.

The numerous site visits made it obvious that it was a very the warm and friendly atmosphere in the organization. The bond that the employees shared with each other became more evident with each visit. The findings from the within case analysis were shared with the HR head and verified.

Chapter 5

Within Case Analysis - Case B

5.1 Case Description

This organization is also listed in the GPTW survey list of 2021 and 2022 and rated high on the trust and culture index. Besides, they were also certified as one of the best workplaces for women in 2021. Established in 2000, Case B is a leading long term life insurance solutions provider in India, offering a range of individual and group insurance solutions that meet various customer needs. With 372 branches spread across the country, Case B boasts of over 300 partnerships comprising of both traditional as well as new echo-system partners. The company's vision is to be one of the most successful and admired life insurance companies, offering best value for money and setting the standards for other such organizations. Excellence, people engagement, customer centricity, integrity and collaboration are all the values the company upholds. Their CEO was recognized as one of the 50 most powerful women in business in 2021. The organization can boast of having 3 powerful women on their board of eleven members. The company gives a lot of importance to 'social responsibility' and this is reflected in their CSR initiatives, that focuses on supporting the evolving needs of the most vulnerable sections of society. They firmly believe that sustainable business growth could be achieved when it goes hand in hand with social responsibility. Their long-stated strategy of balanced product mix, diversified distribution, continuous product innovation and re-imagining insurance through the effective use of technology has all enabled them to continue their journey despite the ever-changing external environment. As a part of enabling superior service to customers, they have leveraged technology to offer a range of digital initiatives which are totally contactless and paper less, across most of their channels. They believe in striving to build a resilient, tech-driven and sociable business, based on their values and mission – a powerful combination.

This organization has launched several initiatives to promote a diverse and inclusive workplace, especially one which is highly conducive for women. Their leadership had initiated programs like 'Punaragaman,' through which they have been able to successfully hire women professionals who had taken a break due to personal exigencies. Maternity transition programs, mentoring circles, specific capability development initiatives, policies focusing on sustained inclusion are all initiatives adopted for empowering women in this organization. During the pandemic, they had proactively taken the decision to implement 'work from home' to not compromise on the welfare of their employees. They had even gone ahead with an early release on salary to their employees in March 2021, to help them during the difficult time. Zonal task forces were activated from an employee care and business point of view, to facilitate seamless communication with the senior leadership. The hierarchical structure of the organization comprised of the Associate (1A) who would also be a fresher, the Senior associate (1B), the Associate manager, Deputy manager (3A) and Manager (3B)

at the junior level. Senior manager (4), Chief manager (5A) and Assistant Vice President Associate (5B) were part of middle management and Vice presidents (6A & 6B), Senior Vice Presidents (7) and above (8) along with the COO, CHRO, CEO - were all part of senior management team.

One of the questions to the participants in Group 1 (Hiring panel members and HR team members) was to describe the hiring process in the organization. Since hiring is a significant part of this study, the researcher feels it would be good to provide a brief overview of the hiring process, as described by the respondents, along with the background information of the organization.

Basically, the hiring process in Case B is divided into distribution hiring and non-distribution hiring. Distribution hiring, which forms the larger part of hiring in the organization comprises of front-line sales (FLS) as well as operations. For this level, there is a selection assessment tool which is largely competency based and which also assesses communication skills and aptitude. These are mainly customer interfacing roles and other roles in branch operations. Some of the competencies required in this form of hiring would be generic in nature and some specific to the channel or distribution model. This AI tool which is scientifically designed to promote objectivity, helps to reduce bias in the selection processes. Competencies as well as the aptitude would be specific to the channel of distribution or the function whereas communication would be more generic in nature. The candidates who gets through with this first step in selection process would also be required to undergo interview with HR as well as the line managers where in the softer skills and values would get assessed. For every position, candidate profiling is done wherein the profile of the candidate gets compared to the job description and is filtered. Thus, at the junior management level, it is all automated because of the large-scale hiring that happens (10000-12,000 people pa). The system takes care of shortlisting the profiles first by seeing what are the relevant experiences or requirements for that role. Once the profile gets shortlisted, they are evaluated with the help of the AI tool and this would basically eliminate whoever does not meet the standards or threshold. Here, the standards or threshold is specific to the organization. This gets decided by the management. Whoever clears that moves forward to the next; they get shortlisted for the interview and people who gets cleared in the interview are mostly made the offer and onboarded. The 'demographic aspect' is looked after beautifully by the selection tool, and this would probably constitute 70-80 % of the hiring process. The latter 20%, is assessed through the interviews, in the case of junior management. According to the respondents, the interviews are usually of a very short duration. Most of the job, with such a huge volume of hiring at the junior levels is done by the selection tool. That is, broadly the hiring process for junior management. At the middle management and senior management, for external hiring, there is no selection tool because it is not a very voluminous hiring that happens. It is mostly done with the help of interviews, but multiple levels of interviews are done to evaluate the functional fitment and the culture fitment in the case of both middle and senior management

Moving on to the process of data collection, an introductory mail along with a very brief description of the study and its purpose was sent to the HR head of the organization. Later, a detailed presentation was also made by the researcher to convey the purpose of this study.

The HR head also spoke at length of their vision and goals, their growth trajectory, their future as well as the initiatives that have already been taken towards building a diverse and inclusive culture in the organization. The researcher had assured confidentiality of the participant's responses at every stage of the study both in mail and in person. The formalities involved for carrying out such a study in the organization was discussed and the researcher was introduced to the HR manager for further coordination. The HR manager had assisted with coordinating the interviews and all the interviews were done via Zoom collaborative web-conferencing software. The interviews happened over the next 3-4 months and they were transcribed simultaneously, to the best extent possible. During this period, along with the transcriptions, the researcher was also engaged in preparing memos for easy recollection of details, observations, and reflections. The duration of each interview was around 40 minutes to an hour, especially with Group 1 participants who consisted of the hiring panel members and the HR team members. Few of the interviews with the fresh recruits, who belonged to group 2 (which consisted of the fresh female recruits as well as the female employees who had undergone promotions in the organization) were shorter in duration. The researcher felt that this could probably be due to apprehension or hesitancy on the part of the fresh recruits to part with any sensitive information. However, the researcher very tactfully managed to ensure that they were at ease throughout and assured them full confidentiality. All the participants agreed for a follow up interview, if required.

Profile information of participants (anonymous) is provided to facilitate a better understanding of the participant perspectives in the organization as the researcher believes that it would be difficult to understand the participant's contribution without knowing the details of the participant's role in the organization

As mentioned earlier, group 1 consists of Hiring panel members as well as HR team members and they were a mix of both males and females. Six participants were interviewed on different dates from the organization and their responses were transcribed and coded.

This data analysis led to the development of very interesting themes. All these themes that have emerged from group one participant interviews, responds to the first research question on the various organizational elements that shape the culture fitment based hiring processes. The themes as well as the categories are described below.

Themes & Categories (Group 1)

Theme 1- Functional and cultural fitment-based hiring strategy with slightly more focus on functional aspect

One of the major themes that emerged as a result of the coding process was the significance the organization attached to both functional fitment as well as culture fitment in the hiring process of the organization. In fact, very interestingly, participant responses showed that they

seemed to be attaching more significance to functional fitment during the hiring process. This theme is in response to the first research question on the various elements that shape culture fitment based hiring processes. It describes the hiring strategy of the organization. Functional fit assessment, Cultural fit assessment and Hiring process are the categories that support this theme.

Functional fit assessment

When the participants were asked to describe the hiring process of the organization, the participant responses revealed that their hiring predominantly focused on functional fitment aspects than culture fitment. Some of the codes that were grouped under this category were "competency-based selection tool," "critical to quality parameters," "focus on digitalization" etc. According to the hiring panel members who were interviewed, the attributes of a good candidate would include "high achievement orientation," educational qualification, previous work experience, "excellence," "understanding of the industry," "good analytical skills", ability to "manage scale of growth", "manage pressure and volume" etc. They should be able to "adapt to technology," have a good "understanding of the product," be "conceptually very clear" be "able to provide solutions" and so on. Out of the six respondents in group 1, almost all the responses very clearly indicate that functional fitment was given high priority, in fact more than culture fitment in the process of hiring. In the words of one of these participants who was an HR team member as well as a part of the hiring panel, "You see, culture fit from my point of view is the kind of accomplishments they made and they feel pride from a personal need point of view." These words itself brings out the irony of the situation. For this respondent, even culture fit of candidate is measured through assessing how much of a successful employee in terms of functional aspects, he/she would be in the organization. Again, in the words of another respondent who was also a part of the HR hiring panel – "What I would rather look at is what that person has done, achieved, how aspirational he/she is, what kind of job roles the person has picked up, how much subject knowledge the person has in his or her domain…. those are all aspects I can quantify, scale and rate. Otherwise, in the 30 minutes, all I can do is to ask about the family, his upbringing …. I don't know how much I can make out and be in a fair position to say that this person will culturally fit into my organization". Again, another senior hiring panel member says – "The better the candidate alignment in terms of performance output, the more sustainability and higher engagement. So, we will have a highly productive workforce which would translate eventually into a sustainable work model, work culture and customer satisfaction". These words clearly suggest that if high performance can be ensured, all the rest including becoming a 'culture fit' will fall into place! So, very clearly, as indicated in all these responses, although culture fit was also being evaluated as mentioned by all the participants as well as indicated through the values framework in the organization, from their responses during the interviews, they seemed to be associating slightly more importance to functional fitment as an evaluation criterion during hiring.

Cultural fit assessment

While describing the hiring process, the respondents also spoke at length about the various attributes they would look for in the prospective employee. According to one of the

respondents: "we look at past data – all past experiences in the companies worked for, roles that were managed. So, whether they would fit culturally will come through the interview process as and when we also assess the competencies. People engagement, integrity, customer orientation and collaboration are all values the organization upholds. These get assessed when they talk about scenarios and tasks worked on." Codes like "tests assessing fitment also," "have a values framework", "senior management gaga over culture fitment", "high rating for culture fitment", "objectives aligned to values", "behavioral competencies to fit with organization", "better fit better retention" etc. are some of the codes that were grouped under 'culture fit assessment'. Although all the respondents of group 1 mentioned culture fitment to be an important part of hiring, most of them seemed to be mentioning the functional fitment attributes more when describing the candidate attributes that were considered during the hiring process. According to one of the respondents, senior management was "gaga over culture fitment." Here, the respondent's words indicate a slight mockery over the approach of the senior management. Thus, although culture fitment was important part of the hiring strategy, it seemed to be slightly less important than functional fitment in the organization. Again, another hiring panel member says – "One can deliver performance in two ways, that is by demonstrating right behaviors in line with the organization culture or by not demonstrating those behaviors which are not in line with the organizational culture and still you are achieving results." Here, the respondent's words indicate that behaviors can be managed or molded to suit the organizational culture. This probably explains the reason as to why culture fitment is not mentioned as often as functional fitment, by the respondents, although considered very much an important part of the hiring process,

Hiring Process

The responses to the first interview question, which was to describe the hiring process in the organization, revealed various stages in the hiring process where either cultural or functional fitment were being assessed. The responses revealed stages in the hiring process where both of these fitment criteria were being assessed separately and at times simultaneously. Codes like "job description to understand expectations", "candidate profile to meet job description", "competency based selection tools", "objectively and scientifically designed selection tool", "customized selection tool", "multiple interviews for mid and senior management", "functional and cultural fitment", "interviews to assess softer attributes", "age restrictions", "background verification", "educational qualification", "has integrity", "previous work experience", "tests assessing cognitive skills" ,"medium or high fit", "achievements and accomplishments", high achievement orientation" etc. are all codes which were identified and which suggest that the hiring process in the organization took into consideration both cultural and functional fitment aspects, either one at a time in certain processes or simultaneously and either directly or indirectly. Thus, the theme 'Functional fitment and Cultural fitment-based hiring strategy.'

Theme 2 – High performance-oriented culture

This theme again responds to the first research question. Here the categories under the theme

are: Focus on excellence and achievement, Higher focus on functional fit attributes and Hiring manager's perceptions.

Focus on excellence and achievement:

The interview question focusing on the hiring process elicited interesting responses from the participants which revealed the high priority they were associating to excellence and achievement. The responses clearly indicated that the interviewers were attaching a lot of importance to questions that hovered around candidate's accomplishments and subject knowledge. Besides, 'Excellence' is also included as a part of the organization's values framework. All the respondents of group one had very clearly revealed at some point or the other, the importance they associated to excellence in performance and achievements.

According to one of the respondents: "Past history of work experience, how many years you have worked, how many promotions you got, approximate incentive was how much…. these are all questions that we ask which will help us to understand the past track record, understand the candidate's past desires as well as the current aspirations." These words indicate the high focus on achievements during the hiring process. In fact, the researcher realized this with the first two or three interviews itself. This was further confirmed by the responses from the remaining interviews that were conducted. Another respondent who was also a hiring panel member said: "we talk about certain specific parameters, like in sales, you need to have a high achievement orientation because sales is all about numbers." One of the HR team members had commented: "Everyone has got a KRA, there is nothing else that speaks for itself, okay. I mean, the performance speaks for itself, okay." Another respondent says "in sales, you need to have high achievement orientation and so most of our questions would focus on probing achievement orientation of the candidate." All these words clearly indicate the high focus and importance the interviewers are associating to achievement.

According to another respondent who was an HR team member, "Meritocracy is not just doing well in the KRAs. The strong governance on top, the number of reports that come in, everything is audited, checked and rechecked. We cannot fib. Internal standards are taken very seriously and audits happen every year. How many HR functions get audited annually? I doubt if any….in fact, many HR functions do not even get audited at all." These words clearly reveal the priority that is given to 'excellence' in the organization.

Another respondent who is also a part of the hiring panel says – "our culture is highly meritocratic. Innovation has kept us ahead of the curve…. then there is excellence. That means always raise your standards, challenging the status quo. That is also a part of our values framework – EPICC. This is again something I have personally experienced and seen…you thrive, you succeed and enjoy." These words reflect the high focus on 'excellence' during the hiring processes.

Another respondent who is also a hiring panel member says: “In my view I would say the pace that we walk on, the hunger to do new things are all very important for us, especially in the age group that we are in. We want to do well for ourselves, we all also want to reach somewhere. So, you need an environment that is constantly encouraging these thoughts. I think it has worked fantastically not just for me but for many people and that is our culture. I think we generally have that culture …it’s now or later! And, I feel it has kind of worked well for all of us here.”

These words again clearly suggest the presence of a very strong performance oriented or meritocratic culture that seems to really push the young highly ambitious employees to put in their best and thus attain their goals in the organization.

Again, “hunger to do things”, “keep with the pace”, “past accomplishments part of culture”, “scale of growth of candidate”, “performance-based promotions”, “growth at rapid pace”, “highly innovative processes”, all suggest a high focus on the candidate achievements as well as the importance given to uphold ‘excellence’ as a value in the organization. In fact, one of the respondents even mentioned that the act focusing on past accomplishments of the candidate is itself a part of their culture. One can imagine here, the very high significance and value associated to achievements and excellence.

Candidate attributes that focus more on functional fitment

This is one of the categories that is grouped under the theme ‘High performance-oriented culture.’ All the interviews with group one respondent’s elicited responses which revealed that the candidate attributes the hiring managers seem to be focusing on more, are mostly those attributes related to functional fitment. Although culture fitment attributes are considered important and are also evaluated either directly or indirectly, slightly more emphasis seemed to be on the attributes of functional fitment. “Relevant experience”, demographics, “educational qualifications”, “high achievement orientation”, “can perform well”, selling skills, customer orientation, “manage pressure”, “manage scale”, “able to deliver”, “product knowledge”, “conceptually clear”, “be a graduate” …. were all some of the codes that were grouped under this category.

For instance, one of the respondents who is a Hiring panel member says – “There is an HR interview where the HR evaluates competencies of the person. First, they would check the CTQ (critical to quality) parameters. So, there are data points wherein the first data point is that age has to be within 24-38 years. Secondly, anyone having minimum two years sales experience has a higher chance of succeeding. So, this is also a CTQ parameter.” He/she should also be a graduate.” The same respondent also said – “To develop behavior, it requires a time frame. So, three months in a time frame for the candidate who gets rejected at first chance to develop upon their required areas and come back! That is 90 days cooling off period”! As these respondent’s words suggest, they believe that behavior can be developed at a later stage also, but, the functional competencies should be there in the candidate.

There was another very surprising and unique response from a senior hiring panel member and the researcher in me feels it is important to mention it here. According to this respondent – "when a person comes to me, it is my job to ensure that the candidate fits into the culture, gets adjusted to the environment. I need to ensure that smooth transition for the candidate." So, this respondent while hiring, would give more weightage to the functional attributes of the candidate and if there is functional fitment, then then he/she would be onboarded. Culture

fitment, according to the respondent can be acquired even after joining the organization. However, this is also an example for a situation where functional fitment takes precedence over culture fitment of the candidate.

Hiring manager's perceptions on fitment

For the hiring manager, according to the interviewee responses, good fitment leads to an inclusive culture in the organization. They believed in "better fit, better performance." They also came from the point of view that "diversity comes after inclusion."

In the words of one of the HR team members who is also a hiring panel member, - "if the candidates are medium fits or high fits, then we take it up. If it is a low fit, we drop it and that person cannot come into the system for the next 90 days". There is a threshold here…. that is 70%. So, anyone who achieves this threshold limit is considered medium or high fit. Anyone below this is a low fit, which scientifically means he/she will then not be able to understand our product concept because it is an intangible product. So, one should be conceptually very clear and should have a good grasping skill along with good communication skills to make a pitch."

Here, the manager very clearly seems to be associating more of functional fitment attributes to the term – 'fitment'. According to this manager, cultural attributes or behavior can be acquired or learned over time. He mentions that 90 days is a good time frame for any rejected candidate to go back, assess himself and make the necessary changes or learnings and retry. This very clearly suggest that although culture fitment is very important part of their evaluation criterion, invariably, the hiring managers and HR team members through their responses seem to be indicating that they are associating slightly more importance to functional fitment attributes of the candidate. The researcher feels this could be contributing to the high meritocratic culture or performance-oriented culture in the organization. Culture fitment, as discussed earlier seem to be getting assessed indirectly through the tests or directly through very few of the questions posed to the candidate. Undoubtedly, although not specifically mentioned by any of the managers, functional fitment seems to be more significant throughout the hiring process.

Again, another respondent says – "when we look from a culture point of view, we try to understand the candidate's priorities in life. What are the things they are really proud of? If they have to mention about their

notable accomplishments, what are those things? Basically, the kind of accomplishments they have made and for what things they feel a sense of pride from a personal need point".

Even here, the manager associates culture fitment to 'accomplishments of the candidate' and to factors which gives them a 'sense of pride'. Functional fitment. on the other hand, includes "previous work experience", "educational qualification", "product knowledge", demographics, "ability to understand customer needs", "ability to provide solutions to customer issues" and so on.

In fact, in the words of another respondent, also a hiring panel member – "if they are consistently low performers who exit or they are not good in their behavior or conduct or is is not in line with the organizational culture and values, those are all non-regrettable exits ! For talent which is really good and are leaving the organization, then exit interviews should be done very skillfully for valuable insights". These words were in response to the researcher's question on exit interviews during the course of the interview. The researcher during the last stages of the interview session had asked about attrition rates which further had led to the manager also mentioning about exit interviews and how they could be useful. These words clearly indicate the relevance that is there for both functional and cultural fitment in the organization, although the sessions revealed slightly more importance for functional fitment.

Theme 3 - Hiring Manager perceptions and experiences revealing divergent views on bias, including gender bias

This theme responds to the latter part of the first research question on how culture fitment-based hiring influences the assessment of women candidates. The categories under this theme are: Hiring manager experiences on bias, and, Hiring manager perceptions on bias

Hiring manager experiences on bias

Out of the six respondents of group one interviewed, three had narrated experiences of bias (recency bias, industry based bias..) and one had said that they had experienced or witnessed gender bias. The different perceptions on bias were very interesting. Each person had his/her own views or experiences to narrate. Being a part of management team, unlike group two respondents who consisted of fresh female recruits and female employees having undergone promotions, all the respondents were very chilled about sharing their thoughts and experiences on having experienced or witnessed any kind of unfairness or bias in the organization.

One of the HR team members had narrated an incident wherein he felt that there had been gender bias at play. According to him: "there was a candidate who had cleared the NFLS position. She was not someone who would switch jobs every one or two years, but had been stable in her work profile. She had had to take

a break as she was on the family way and her new partner was quite a demanding person too. She took the decision to resign and take a sabbatical. After a year and four months, she came again for the interview. Management was of the view that had it been six to seven months it would have been fine…. but one year is too long. She tried to convince them, explaining her tough personal situation, and also pointing out the fact that she had always been a stable and high potential employee while working. But her efforts were unsuccessful. So then, we took her CV…went through the entire CV data by data, her achievements…. we even went to the extent of cross checking and verifying one particular point in her CV with her previous company in order to influence and convince our HR. She had to go through three rounds of interviews (normally it is just one) and finally the HR approved her and she was again selected. Because of all the effort we took, she got through. I feel it was quite unnecessary and unfair " After hearing the narration, the researcher could not help sharing the sentiments of the respondent and feels that had it been a male employee who had taken leave for some reason or the other, the process probably would have been easier and shorter and not so much of effort would have been required to get him back into the organization, especially an employee who once had had a good track record.

Another respondent, also a hiring panel member, says: "I remember …there were these two candidates – one from the same industry and another from a different industry. So, there was this tendency of the hiring manager to hire the candidate who was from the same industry, overlooking some of the major positives in the other candidate. Some industry based bias…..I guess. Here, although the respondent did not mention whether it was a female or a male candidate, the researcher could put this down as an example for 'bias' at play in the organization.

Another respondent who was part of the hiring panel says: "something just happened recently when I was interviewing 3-4 candidates. I had come across a candidate whom I knew from a competition. I had seen that person do the job. then and that person never impressed me. So later when his resume came to me for shortlisting, I decided to take on a fresh perspective. But, despite my best efforts, that thing always played in my mind ….so, even in that interview maybe I was not listening to him 100 percent! There was some cloud in my mind about this person and I had not taken him. I was thinking about it later…. this just happened recently in fact."

The researcher feels that this is also very clearly an instance of bias (recency bias). The respondent had also in between mentioned that this was a male candidate.

The above instances were all narrated by male respondents who were part of the hiring panel. According to one of the female respondents who was also a part of the hiring panel there have been instances of gender bias in the past, but not any recently that she can recollect. According to her: "the world has changed. And now I don't think anybody thinks like that. We have had cases of bias where competencies were involved. But now, we are so large and we have so many roles. And I feel these biases happen when roles are less… And in my case, I am not bothered about race, religion, caste…so I might not be the best person to answer this."

Here, the respondent although vehemently says that no incidents of bias has occurred recently, she also states that she might not be the best person to answer this, implying there could be others who might have encountered some unpleasant experience. She also says that cases of bias has been reported in the past for sure. Thus, the narrations by some of the hiring panel members as well as HR team members of group one reveals the presence of bias in the organization. However, among the six respondents, although 4 had narrated instances of various forms of bias, only one respondent has narrated instance that reflects gender bias and another respondent had stated that no such instances have taken place recently although instances of bias have been reported in the past.

Hiring manager perceptions on bias

The respondents not only had different experiences to share on biases, but also had different views and perceptions to share which were very interesting. One of the respondents who is a hiring panel member says: "We hire the best fit for the role. If there is a case of gender bias or any other form of bias, you can always challenge…. we don't see such instances coming up " This respondent says biases don't occur in the organization and in case they do, one can always challenge them. According to her, "the world has now changed. Nobody even thinks like that anymore. And, besides we have too many roles to offer here as we are a large organization. Hence very less chances of any biased behavior. … And in my case, I am not bothered about race, religion, caste…so I might not be the best person to answer this." The researcher feels that this respondent's words reflect some amount of uncertainty.

Another respondent who is also a hiring panel member said, "we are all humans…it does happen and it just happened recently .." He went on to narrate an instance where he himself had once held a very biased stance during hiring an employee. The researcher realized that it was a case of recency bias. However, it was clear that the respondent had not experienced any case of gender bias when he said: "my success ratio has been very good, people applying and I have taken them on board. Maybe I believe in that Lakshmi karma ….but it has been really good for me." These words reveal that the respondent is a clear supporter of gender diversity and has had no experience of gender bias in the work place. This respondent seemed to have abundant respect for candidate views as well a faith in candidate's ability to make the right choices as can be seen from his words – "I have seen lots of instances where people say someone got recently married and so let's not hire her …or something like that. But I think these are all things best left to that candidate." The researcher feels that this is a very progressive outlook and approach and reflects good leadership skills .

Another senior hiring panel member said – "Unconscious or conscious biases do exist. As human beings we are bound to have them and they play a role in our decision-making processes. I have seen biases happening here." He went on to narrate an instance that he had witnessed in the organization where there had been some amount of bias (not gender bias) at play. There was yet another respondent, also a senior HR hiring panel member who narrated an instance of gender bias in the organization and how they worked to negate the impact of the bias on that female candidate.

So, here, the hiring managers seem to be having different views, thought processes and experiences regarding bias or gender bias. However, the fact remains that although only one or two cases of gender bias has been shared by these group one respondents, their words indicate that the organization has its share of incidents of bias happening.

Efforts to promote cognitive diversity

Only two of the respondents mentioned cognitive diversity, out of which one respondent expressed a need to probably introduce and encourage cognitive diversity in the hiring process. In the words of this Senior HR professional – "Let's try to look from other industries and even outside of BFSI, who can bring these skillsets the particular role requires…like negotiating skills, selling skills, data orientation, customer orientation and matches our epic values." Again, another respondent seemed to be implementing it. In the words of this Senior HR panel member - "We also look at industry diversity, which means not everybody need to necessarily come from insurance sector. We are open to large no of talent – including non BFSI."

Theme – 4 Hiring strategy aligned to Business strategy (focusing on customer centricity and agility to adapt to changing external and technology landscapes)

This theme highlights the fact that the organization's hiring strategy is aligned to their business strategy or rather the business strategy seems to be aligned to the hiring strategy. This theme also responds to the former half of the first research question on how the culture fitment based hiring processes are shaped in organizations. Here, the categories that come under this theme are: Customer centricity, Focus on technology and Hiring process.

Customer centricity

First and foremost, the researcher feels it important to highlight the fact that 'customer centricity' is one of the values in the organizations values framework (EPICC). The respondent responses also suggest that much importance is given to this aspect during the hiring process as well as after.

According to one of the senior hiring panel members – "Most of the customers come with issues, so you need to patiently handle them. This you have to ensure whether you are in sales or service. Customer service is of paramount importance to us. Without having the right attitude, this becomes very difficult". The respondent further adds: "The candidate should develop a certain curiosity to know and understand the customer needs because we are selling a highly customized product." These words indicate the significance associated to customer centricity, both during the hiring process and after.

Another respondent, also a hiring panel member, says: “Candidate should be able to provide suitable solutions for customer problems. Its not a tangible product that we are selling, rather it is an emotional product.” These words in fact, reveal the passion and depth the respondent has towards the product. Even, while describing the product to the researcher, the language used by the respondent elicited an eagerness that enabled the researcher also to share that passion. The respondent continued – “you also ensured the customer comes back to you repeatedly for cross selling, upselling etc. Here, the researcher recollects all the other respondents who has also mentioned “product knowledge” , “understanding of market” as well as “understanding of the concepts” as important attributes the candidate needs to have. All these complement customer centricity. Another respondent who was an HR team member had mentioned that it was important for the candidate to be able to “communicate in the regional/local language”. This according to the respondent would facilitate “smooth customer relationships”.

Again, in the words of the same respondent, “the whole business revolves around the customers and the shareholders.” Another respondent, also a hiring panel member and HR team member says “the candidate would probably have done a lot of good work, but, still, if he/she appears to be an introvert with less communication skills, I will not hire because they should be able to cover customer experiences.” So, much of the candidate attributes assessed during the hiring process revolves around this ability of the candidate to handle customers effectively. This is mentioned by almost all the group 1 respondents. The researcher feels that this could probably have stood in favor of female candidates as they are assumed to be more adept when it comes to softer skills like patience and empathy.

Focus on Technology

The business strategy of the organization includes “re-imagining the product through effective use of technology.” This is a clear indication of the relevance technology plays in the organization.

In the words of one of the respondents who is an HR team member as well as a hiring panel member – “we believe in a science-based evaluation. We trust data and trend. So, this is like a science-based company because everything we do, even at the CHRO level or in any support function level, we look for data first and then jump to actionable discussions and brainstorming.” These words clearly indicate the significant role of technology in all the processes in the organization including hiring. Again the respondent says – “data is performance history, data is hiring success ratio, data is attrition data, data is promotional data…its all in pockets. So, in our hiring process, the junior level field employees are to undertake a test also which is an online one.

Another respondent, also a hiring panel member, talks about a “selection tool” which is largely competency based. The respondent further goes on to describe the tool as a “very objective and scientifically designed tool,” which is also highly customized to meet the demands of the organization. The respondent says- “the reliability and validity of this tool depends on how it could be linked to the overall performance of the organization including the entire hiring process.” This gives a fair picture of the huge role technology plays in the organization. The respondent further goes on to state that: “this tool gives a very standardized

approach to meet the threshold level of competencies required for each role whereas the softer skills probably gets assessed in the interviews".

The role of technology in the hiring process in evident here. Addressing further the research question on how this technology in hiring could be impacting assessment of women, one of the respondents has stressed the 'objectivity' factor. The researcher also feels that this might be contributing to a large extent to minimize subjectivity or bias in hiring processes.

Hiring process

"Competency based selection tool" for junior level candidates, "automated shortlisting of profiles", "objective and scientifically designed selection tool", "reliable and valid selection tool", "demographics assessed by AI based selection tool", "online assessments" all indicate the technology driven as well as customer centric business strategy of the organization. This hiring process seems to be based on this business strategy of the organization. Both these aspects – technology driven as well as customer centric, seem to be beneficial for the female candidates as technology would enable to reduce subjectivity in hiring processes and customer centricity warrants softer skills, where women seem to be having an upper hand.

Theme 5 - Senior management that strongly supports DEI facilitating gender balance in attrition

Another very important theme that emerged from the analysis is the 'strong senior management support for DEI', which in turn seems to facilitate gender balanced attrition in the organization. This theme responds to the latter half of the first research question on how the culture fitment hiring processes shape women candidate assessments. Senior management that strongly supports DEI facilitates balance not only in in male-female attrition rates but enables curbing and mitigation of biases, that might otherwise happen widely, right from the beginning. The categories that come under this theme are Strong managerial support for female candidates and High employee motivational factors and Hiring manager perceptions.

Strong managerial support for female candidates (DEI)

In the words of one of the respondents who was also an HR hiring panel member: "Two things we look at primarily and in a very focused way is gender diversity and then age. We try to create an echo system where they can thrive nicely…still to cover a lot of ground on that!" These words clearly highlight the high priority that senior management gave to encouraging and supporting gender diversity in the organization. The respondent further spoke at length about the various initiatives that they already have taken to promote and facilitate female work force in the organization. In the words of the respondent – "For returning mothers, we have a program which welcomes women who have taken a career break and want to resume. Flexi work arrangement is another thing we are looking at."

The respondent further added, “when we look at the male vs female front-line sales, we see that the female growth and their retention with the organization is slightly better than the male. And that data itself is very powerful to amplify this thing that we value our female workforce and value diversity very much.” The respondent went on to talk about retention wherein he said, “retention is also better for females…which means they are culturally more alight. That also means they are performing well. Otherwise, how will they get retained in the organization?” The passion and emphasis in these words of the respondent were so obvious that the researcher was sure to hear a repeat of these words from other respondents too!

Another respondent, also a senior hiring panel member as well as part of HR team had much to say about supporting female employees in the workplace. The extent of dedication and conviction the management had in this venture is very clear in the respondent words. The fact that this respondent is a male is even more convincing. In the words of this respondent: “We as a group are focused towards diversity and for us diversity comes first in females…its too early for us to move on to LGBTQ ! The fact that our current CEO is a female is in itself proof of the fact that we are strong supporters of females in workforce and are nudging more female talent”. This respondent couldn’t help control his eagerness in sharing further details in order to be totally convincing. According to him: “our CHRO as well as CEO are both keen to build this diversity and it is because of this focus from their end that we are also able to do it. Otherwise field will go with the field realities only and they will say that ‘no, no, I want one who does the dhanda for us and banda does the dhanda is the terminology we hear from field” ! The researcher was quite amused by the respondent’s words, but, could relate to what exactly he was trying to convey – the extent of senior management support for diversity promotion.

The respondent further went on to explain: “The reason is the top-down approach. Besides, in my career of around 18 years, I have mostly had female bosses. So, I have a personal conviction that female colleagues are able to multi task well than males.” He also said, “that internal conviction we are able to pass on to our team members”. Now, it was evident to the researcher as to why the senior management was so passionate in promoting diversity (gender diversity) in the organization and above all, despite the prevalent biases, how they were able to sustain their diversity promotion efforts that was also leading to female retention and a gender balanced attrition. The respondent also spoke highly about female multi-tasking skills, soft skills and mentioned the fact that majority of his female colleagues have got lots of promotions over the years.

Again, to further substantiate the aspect of gender balanced attrition, in the words of one of the respondents who is also a hiring panel member: “There is equal attrition here. I do monitor that and we try to intervene in case we think necessary. But, no, I am sure… I check the data also. Attrition levels remain almost the same.”

Thus, the researcher would like to suggest that the primary reason for the gender balanced attrition in spite of biases being prevalent as mentioned earlier, is the strong senior management support for DEI in the organization. The rest of the interviews also suggest the same.

High employee motivational factors

This category was grouped under the theme 'Senior management that strongly supports DEI facilitating gender balanced attrition'. Motivational factors mentioned below facilitated work satisfaction and helped to retain much of the female employees also.

According to one of the respondents who is a hiring panel member, the management was very "empathetic and supportive of employee issues". The "hard working employees who are serious about their work" are always a source of mutual inspiration and motivation. The respondent adds: "work life balance has to be maintained. We need to be sensitive about these things and balance them out." These words clearly reveal the understanding and flexibility that was there in the management which is a high motivating factor for the employees.

Again, in the words of another respondent who is a senior HR team member as well as hiring panel member: "We have mechanisms, grievance mechanisms. People are free to reach out to the HR and talk things out.

Besides, the interviews revealed that the organization is extremely "professional", "abusive language is unacceptable", there were "strict rules on behavior and conduct". One respondent who is an HR team member adds : "Although all organizations have employee engagement activities, we feel emotional connect also plays a very important role. We try to involve families too at times to attend events. Besides, the management is very transparent and respects employees." "Free wellness initiatives", "Free medical consultation", "Regular management interaction", "diversity initiatives", "growth opportunities" are all some of the motivational factors as mentioned by the respondents.

Theme 6 - Pace setting, Coaching and Participative leadership style complementing the business strategy

According to a Senior HR panelist – "We recently conducted an E-roundtable, where we connected with all the employees, presenting, and briefing what the org is doing for them and ask them how we can improve. We got inputs and have implemented them too." This reflects manager's openness to feedback. Again, in the words of a senior HR panelist - "We have these exit interviews wherein we have very open discussions and at times get such valuable inputs to act on". Another senior panel member says – The kind of comfort that a candidate would have in interacting with senior members here and putting his/her point across, it's just too good here". These words indicate that Participative leadership style is prevalent amongst the other styles of leadership like pace setting and coaching.

Senior manager (Grp 2) - Even HODs are open to open discussions and conversations just like that..over a call"The categories under this theme are Strong managerial support for female employees, High employee motivational factors, Customer centricity and Focus on technology. The researcher would like to mention that all these categories have been explained in depth earlier. In Pace setting style of leadership, the leader demonstrates the level of performance and quality expected from their juniors. It is a 'result -oriented style of leadership' and this is totally aligned to the performance-oriented culture of the organization as well as

the business strategy. The same applies to coaching style which is all about providing guidance and feedback and thus enabling the employees to grow in the organization. Again, the leadership woks together with all members to make important decisions. This leadership style complements the business strategy which focusses on customer and technology and other changes in the external landscape.

Theme 7 – Culture fitment hiring challenges

Organizational perspective on culture fit challenges

According to one of the respondents who is a hiring panel member as well as an HR team member, the major challenge from the organization's point of view is standardization of the process, especially since the size and scale of the organization is very big. In the respondent's words, "Standardization in our processes is difficult. Our size is huge…this is our plus also! This is also our challenge. Because there are so many hiring managers, so many. So when you have many managers, do you think all will be using the same yard stick? No…they will not be."

Again in the words of another respondent who is a hiring panel member: how do you attract those talent that is aligned to your organization? You may have the job posting out there….but, how will you ensure right fit? So, if your hiring process is designed well, you can resolve this to a large extent".

Here, the respondent highlights the need to have a clear and transparent communication with the candidate, in terms of the job posting and job description.

Managerial perspective on culture fit challenges

Some of the codes under this category are, "balancing culture fitment and competency", "balancing culture fitment and experience", "impulsive candidate responses", "fluctuating candidate responses" etc. In the words of a group one respondent who is a hiring panel member: "there is no issue as such. Its just to get somebody who fits with our culture and at the same time has the experience and ability to handle scale" ….that's the only problem. Nothing else…."

Another respondent, who is an HR team member says: "lot of people talk fast, but, they will have thought clarity and conviction. Then its fine…there is a problem when they give fluctuating answers in interviews. Then we have to ask the same question in a different manner!

Indirect culture fit evaluation

Indirect evaluation of culture fitment seemed to be challenging for some of the respondents. In the words of one of the respondents who is also a hiring panel member and HR team member, "we have derived the culture through part of the questions which we have, like what do you consider as your accomplishment? etc….that is how we are able to evaluate.

It is interesting to note here that even when trying to assess culture fit, the respondent's question to the candidate actually refers to a functional fitment aspect (accomplishments)! This reveals the slightly higher priority associated to functional fit assessment in the organization. This also highlights the performance-oriented culture that exists in the organization

Themes & Categories (Group 2)

Group 2 as mentioned earlier, consists of six female employees - three female employees who have been hired recently, i.e.; completed at least three months but not exceeding one year and three female employees who have undergone promotion interviews or have had promotions in the organization. Below, the researcher explores the various themes as well as the categories that have contributed towards formulating the themes. Again, all the interviews happened online due to the Covid situation. There was a gap of few days between each of the interviews, which were being coordinated by one of the HR team members. Transcribing was done simultaneously. All the respondents agreed to a follow up session, if required. A summary of the findings in connection to the strategic elements of the research question is also discussed along with the themes.

Theme 1

Culture fitment important criteria for both organization and candidate

This theme responds to the second research question. It highlights the importance of culture fitment for the candidates as well and not just for the managers. The interview experiences of the candidates reveal the importance the organization gives to culture fit as an evaluation criterion. Employees positive thoughts and comments on the culture suggests that they are a good culture fit in the organization. Thus, this theme reconfirms the organization's focus on culture fitment (as also mentioned by group 1 participants) and reveals that most of

participants are a good fit in the organization. The major categories under this theme are - Company features attractive for candidate and Interview process focusing on culture fitment

Company features attractive for candidate

In response to the question on what were the factors that had initially attracted the candidate to the organization, this respondent had very interesting points to narrate. According to the respondent who is new to the organization, the main reason for joining was that the "role was good." In the respondent's words – "There is this friend of mine who works here. So, I touched base with him to check how the culture is in general and he gave me positive reviews about the company in terms of culture as well as my 'would be' manager if I get selected for the role. He told me that it's a very professional set up…not a typical Indian kind, but gives importance to personal life as well." These words indicate the importance candidate associates to a 'good culture' in the organization. They indulge in 'background work' even before they join to ensure that they would be a 'good fit' in the organization. Another respondent, also a recent joinee says – "they shared a PPT with us on campus with lot of business insights and data labs. The roles were well defined and they also shared a complete career path for us." Again, the respondent highlights the relevance of good and transparent communication between the company and the candidates. They would prefer to have a clear idea of how their career progression would be in the organization once they join and seem to be enquiring about these aspects before joining the organization. Thus, culture in the organization seems to be a crucial factor for the candidates too and not just an evaluation criterion for the managers.

Another respondent who is a total fresher says – "I had some seniors in my campus who were already selected. So, I had some perspective from them also. I knew that the culture here was good as I had already got to know through them." Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are "culture is good", "work life balance good", good reviews from old employees, "positive reviews on company culture", "company brand", "corruption free department and business" etc. These codes indicate that company culture is important for the candidates too and that some of them have taken the trouble to do a 'culture background check' even before joining the organization.

Culture fit assessed in interwiews

The interview experiences of the candidate revealed that culture fit is assessed, but mostly in an indirect manner. According to one of the respondents who is a female candidate who had undergone promotions in the organization – "one of the questions was how I would handle a particular situation in a team. Then they wanted to know how I would be interacting with a client…how I would present there and all such aspects. I guess they were judging my behavior in different situations here." These words of the respondent indicate that culture fitment is being assessed here, but in an indirect manner. Again, another respondent shared – "In the second round of interview, they asked me about my strengths and weaknesses, why I chose this company, the reasons for couple of switches I had in my CV…. about my husband. What he does and all that". Again, these words indicate that the interviewers were trying to assess the candidate's family back ground, behavior, values and goals etc. The researcher realized that although very few questions seemed to be directly probing the culture fitment of the candidate, the fact that the candidates can distinguish the stages in the hiring process where cultural fitment is assessed is a clear indication that it is definitely a good amount of focus on culture fitment from both candidates and management.

Some of the descriptive and in vivo codes under this category are “behavioral aspects assessed through interviews”, behavior assessed indirectly, “way I introduce myself”, “how I will act in a situation”, personal background assessed, “my strengths and weaknesses”, “why this co”, stability in career, “know what was not on resume” etc .

Theme 2

Female candidate/employee experiences reflecting dissatisfaction and bias

Candidate/employee perceptions on organizational culture

According to one of the respondents – “the culture here is very leader specific. I mean, the leader that you roll up eventually, so I can’t comment that the entire organization is, you know, maybe I’m in a role where I’m just lucky because I have heard that on the Sales side, it is not so rosy and that people have to push through.” These words suggest the prevalence of dissatisfaction in certain areas in the organization. However, according to one of the respondents who had joined during the covid times, even though her interactions were mostly online, this respondent had good experiences and thoughts to share. According to the respondent – “we have only five working days in a week. We are very professional. My manager is very understanding. During covid, he was okay with us working from home. I really consider myself grateful that I have such a manager, otherwise it would have been very tough.”. The researcher would like to bring to notice that along with instances of unfairness or unpleasantness, there are also positive comments that are coming from the participants on the organization’s culture.

Some of the codes under these categories are –“not typically Indian kind”, “not a typical set up”, good work life balance”, “leader specific culture”, “culture comes above pay”, “culture quite open, “culture fitment important”, “comfortable amongst same kind of people”, “am in a good organization, “culture has helped”, “people factor good”, “bosses with similar values” etc are some of the codes that reveal the perceptions of the candidates/ employees on organizational culture.

Unfair or unpleasant situations and bias

Another category under the theme ‘Female candidate /employee experiences reflecting discontentment and dissatisfaction’ is ‘Unfair or unpleasant situations and bias’. One of the

employees, also a fresh recruit, shared her dissatisfaction over her team. In her words - “Given our team size is 8-9 people, I feel collective intelligence is somewhere lost as we don’t meet up that frequently. That is not there in my team …which I think should be there. How do you even help each other out if this is not there?”

These words reflect a certain level of dissatisfaction over the existing situation. Again, another respondent who had undergone promotions says – "I know for a fact that some of our new recruits did not feel welcome into the team or they felt a bit out of place. And our team meetings have not been happening since last couple of months. So, I know that some of them are disoriented because they are clueless as to what is going on in the company! And I think few left because of this. I don't exactly know but I am assuming because I used to talk with them. I have not really faced any bias or anything though." Again, these words also clearly suggest the prevalence of some amount of discontentment and dissatisfaction amongst at least few of the employees.

Again, another respondent says- "I wouldn't say I vibe with everyone. I just stick to my work. And now, especially because of this Covid, I don't go everyday…that also adds to everything I guess." The researcher feels that the covid situation must be contributing to any angst the respondent must be experiencing. Another respondent who had been working for two years now and had undergone promotions too narrated an incident wherein she felt there was a lot of unfairness that had happened. In her words – "There was one senior manager position and there were five managers who were eligible for the post. Despite this, one manager was recruited externally. We were all shocked at this. All the managers in the company were in fact, were tenured enough. A lot of similar stuff has happened in fact." The researcher also sensed a certain amount of anger and bitterness in the respondent as she narrated the incident.

In the words of another respondent, a group two participant who has undergone promotions, -"I have seen some amount of biased stuff happening. It happened with one of my colleagues recently. There was this position open and two of my colleagues had applied…both who had worked for 4-5 years in the same department. But the seniors seemed to have already decided whom to select! As result one of them was not even shortlisted for the interview rounds despite both being at par with each other on everything." These words suggest the prevalence of subtle biases in the organization.

The researcher realized that although none of the group 2 participants reported any gender bias as such, a general feeling of dissatisfaction and discontentment is prevalent as per the narratives. Instances of other forms of bias are also being reported. The researcher, at this juncture, recalls the group one respondents who had explicitly stated the prevalence of gender bias in the organization. The researcher could not help but wonder if these fresh recruits were apprehensive or reluctant to share any instance of gender bias and were narrating only the milder unpleasant experiences despite all the reassurances of confidentiality given to them. Some of the codes under this category are "bias there in organization", "already fixed in the minds of seniors", "want to recruit this person only", No gender bias, absence of gender bias, "mostly work as individual contributors", less team spirit, "team management to improve", "don't vibe with all" etc

Theme 3

Candidate interview experiences reveal slightly more focus on functional fitment

Functional fitment in hiring

Although both culture fitment and functional fitment were taken into consideration during hiring, the interviews reveal that slightly more importance seem to be given for functional fitment in hiring. One of the respondents, who is a fresh recruit, narrated her interview experience – "I had to prepare a presentation on Insurance and give it. That was also the elimination round. My interview also was around my presentation and was more tech related. Towards the end, he just asked me to walk him through my entire career graph in terms of where I worked and what role and all that." Here, the respondent's words indicate that focus is more on the technical aspects while hiring. Similar sentiments were echoed by the other respondents also. In the words of another female group two respondent who had undergone promotions in the organization – "they would assess your basic communication skills, your work experience, the things that you used to handle in your previous job or stakeholder cross functional worked in, your analytical skills etc." Again, these words highlight the functional skills of the candidate. Most of the group two respondents echoed similar experiences. Another respondent who is a fresher says –"most of the questions were technical. There were hardly any questions from the HR infact.."

Some of the codes under this category are – "subject knowledge very important", "kept on asking questions on PPT", "more tech related", "ppt on subject area in interview", "previous work experience assessed", high performance expectations conveyed, "very professional", very clear job descriptions", candidate clear on role expectations, "interview questions all technical", "interviewers keen to know past achievements", "cross functional skills assessed", "analytical skills important", "presentation skills important" etc.

High focus on performance and achievements

"He made my deliverables very clear and I realized he's actually someone who ensures that your work has to be like 120%.". These words, an excerpt from the interview experience of the respondent, clearly indicate the high-performance expectations that were there in the organization. The respondent added – "the cost of mistakes is very high here. You cannot afford to send a wrong email to the CEO…. you just cannot make mistakes here. "Interview questions on technical skills", "questions more technical", "unofficially call on Saturdays", "very professional", "presentation on subject area in interview", "subject knowledge very important", "more tech related questions", previous work experience of candidate assessed, "certain standards of deliverables to be met", "manager firm on deliverables", "strict standards by manager", "work to be like 120%", high performance expectations of manager, "cannot

make mistakes", "cross functional skills important", "analytical skills important", "growth within department"…are some of the codes grouped under this category.

Culture fitment challenges

Culture fitment seemed to pose challenges according to few of the respondents. According to one of them – "Few of the candidates, whom we selected and found fit and all, they could not fit in after joining. These instances are very few…but yes, they do happen at times."

Theme 4

Strong senior management support responsible for inclusivity and gender balanced attrition

Strong senior management support for D&I

The senior management support for D& I has been highlighted by almost all the group 2 participants at least very briefly , at some point or the other. According to one of the respondents who has undergone promotions in the organization – " you feel and you know that you are in a good organization. Lots of good things also happen….like, we have good seniors around. I have been lucky to have good bosses . always feel accepted and a part of the organization".

Another respondent who is a fresh recruit says – "both my interviewers were females and they were keen to have a female. I also know that a lot of women are working here. I had already checked with few seniors and got to know that the culture here is quite good. The treatment for women employees, work life balance and all…..".

"My reporting manager is very supportive and also very open. My work involves interacting with her a lot. I think this is a very good learning opportunity for me. I look at her as a mentor, a good mentor…so I feel a good boss is very important". The respondent continues – " the culture here is very open and we can address our bosses by their first name….no need to call Sir or Madam. The seniors are all very approachable You can go to them anytime and they are ready to help you out." These sentiments were further echoed by another respondent who says –" the set up of the office is such that there are not much cabins, even for senior people. From SPT levels onwards, they have cabins which are all on the open floor area which makes them very approachable. Some of the codes under this category are- "interviewers wanted female", no gender discrimination, "lot of women working here", "very supportive reporting manager", "senior management very approachable", "good mentorship", "good growth opportunities for women", absence of micromanagement, mentorship programs, buddy programs, "management very understanding", "very professional", "flexible working hours", work life balance ensured, "flexible working hours" etc.

Balanced male-female attrition

The researcher was surprised to note that despite the prevalence of dissatisfaction and bias, the male female attrition rates seemed balanced. This is very evident from the words of the group two participants. According to one of the respondents, a female participant who has undergone promotions, - "I think the exit rates were higher for men than women earlier. But now, from last one or two years, the attrition rates are high for both males and females. In fact, much of female attrition as explained by the respondents is mostly due to personal reasons. In the words of one of the respondents - "We realized that attrition in women typically happens in the various milestones of their lives. You get married…you might need to relocate; you have a kid…you will have to stay back home mostly." The respondent also mentioned that this attrition in women is under control to a large extent due to the immense support from senior management and their involvement in initiating various support systems like the Maternity transition programs etc.

One of the respondents who had undergone promotions when asked about early exits says - "Once the initial 6 months are crossed, an employee would last for an average 7 years in the organization. This is not any gender in particular…applies to both men and women." Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are : "no variation in male female attrition", "attrition high for males and females", "low compensation causing high attrition", "60% attrition in a department", "attrition due to poor teamwork" etc.

5.4 Observations and Reflections – A summary

Hiring Philosophy, Mission, Values, Founder values and preferences, hiring manager perceptions, Leadership styles, Motivational factor, Accomplishments of candidates/employees, Expectations, Candidate perceptions, business strategy are all organizational elements that contribute to shaping the hiring processes in the organization. Each of these elements has been brought out here in the form of themes derived from categories after coding. The researcher has explained each theme in detail above.

The findings here suggest that the organization has a 'Performance oriented culture'. This is clearly indicated by their high level of focus on achievements, excellence (EPICC values) as well as technology in the organization. Their business strategy, as mentioned earlier, is highly customer centric with focus on agility and adaptability to changing technical and other external landscapes. This business strategy is perfectly aligned to their hiring strategy or rather their hiring strategy is totally aligned to their business strategy. Their hiring strategy, although gives importance to both culture fitment as well as functional fitment, the interviews as well as follow up sessions with the group 1 respondents suggest that the priority associated to functional fitment as an evaluation criterion is slightly higher than culture fitment. The business as well as hiring strategies are complemented by the Pace setting/Coaching and Participative leadership style that seems to be followed by the managers in the organization. The fact that the management prefers candidates from similar backgrounds with work

experience preferably in the same sector or industry, seems to be contributing to a certain lack of cognitive diversity in the organization.

Here, the researcher feels that the performance-oriented culture in the organization which seems to be responsible for slightly more weightage being given to functional fitment during hiring, might be leading to prevalence of biases in the organization. Although instances of gender bias reported seemed very few, the fact that the instance of gender bias as well as other biases are shared by respondents belonging to group 1 (Hiring panel member and HR team member) itself is strong evidence that biases very much exist in the organization. Despite this, the researcher was surprised to learn that the male -female attrition rates, as disclosed during the interviews by the respondents was almost same, ie; balanced gender attrition. The researcher feels that this could be due to the very strong senior management support for DEI which is there in the organization. The impact of the biases was not reflecting much and probably are being handled well before leading to any irretrievable situation as the level of awareness as well as efforts of the senior management to promote DEI is great. It is also interesting to note here that although culture fitment is not given the same weightage as functional fitment (functional fitment given slightly more weightage), biases seem to be prevalent in the organization. This, the researcher feels is contradicting the assumption and confusion around the notion that culture fitment as an evaluation criterion could be perpetuating biases.

These findings based from group 1 analysis is further reconfirmed by the findings based on the themes from group 2 analysis. Group 2 participants have also mentioned the significance attributed to culture fitment in the organization. In fact, many of these participants also spoke about how they had researched on the organization and its culture prior to applying or joining the organization. This clearly suggests how relevant culture fit is to both the employers as well as the employees or candidates. Again, as in the case of group 1, the interview experiences of the group 2 participants also confirm that the level of priority given by the employers to their achievements, performance and competencies is slightly higher than the focus they seem to giving to culture fitment during the hiring processes. Group two participants have also mentioned instances of unfairness or unpleasantness, though not as openly and strongly as the group one participants. One of the group two participants seemed slightly more courageous and narrated an instance of bias that she had witnessed happening to one of her colleagues, a male. The researcher realizes that although many instances and experiences of unpleasantness and unfairness are narrated by the female participants of group 2, they seem to be apprehensive or reluctant to share more sensitive information, probably because many of them are fresh recruits. However, the fact that group one participants themselves narrated and confirmed cases of gender bias is a clear indication of the fact that cases of gender bias are happening in the organization. The group 2 participants have also indicated the occurrence of unpleasant and unfair situations. , The group two participants also speak highly of the management's support for D & I and the initiatives that are being taken to promote growth opportunities for women. Although the organization seems to be having lot of discontent employees (all females interviewed), the balance in the male female attrition levels could be due to the strong senior management support for D&I. This could also a major reason for gender inclusivity not being very heavily impacted in the organization, despite the prevalence of dissatisfaction and biases.

Approximately six months after the initial interviews, the researcher contacted the HR manager to request for a follow up interview with one of the informants. A follow up session was also done with the HR manager wherein the collected data as well as analysis were verified. An appointment was given and the researcher made it on time to the office. Large white boards were kept at the entrance of the office, with the EPICC values printed on them. The researcher was able to spend a good amount of time and observe the employee interactions. The HR manager was briefed about the findings and a copy of the same was shared in order to facilitate a detailed verification by the HR manager. The researcher also was able to meet again with few of the respondents and the analysis was also shared with them for verification.

Chapter 6 - Within Case Analysis (Case C)

6.1 Case description

One of the most admired banking institutions in the country, Case C sticks to the proposition "Digital at the Fore, Human at the core." The digital element signifies the dynamic nature of the organization, constantly adapting to meet the customer needs. Recognized as a 'Great Place to Work,' their leading-edge capabilities make them a much sought after bank in the neo- banking space. Their strategy and commitment to grow pursuing quality over quantity has enabled them to move closer to their goal of being the 'Most Admired Bank.' They believe in balancing attentions to meet the interests and expectations of all their stakeholders – customers, employees and shareholders. Along with co-creating digital enablers and democratizing financial services using hybrid financial instruments for small businesses, Case C also addresses pressing issues such as environmental sustainability and economic inequality. They follow the times tested Values framework - CARES (Commitment to excellence. Agility, Relationship orientation, Ethics and Sustainability). To honor its founder, the bank has instituted a charitable trust in 1996 that indulges in various noble activities like promoting preventive health care and sanitation, promoting education and gender equality, ensuring sustainability, protection and restoration of national heritage, art and culture, rural development projects, slum area projects etc. A guardian of values in public life, the founder has groomed Case C like a family, in a unique tradition bequeathing passion for growth and sacrifice for the common interest.

They have an employee centric business philosophy and they firmly believe that a well-trained, well informed, and happy work force with strong ethics would reap success with no precedents. They focus on developing a 'We' attitude among the employees. Their goal is to be a bank of 'world class standards' and through every action, they wish to convey the message - 'Your perfect banking partner.' CSR has been an inherited and inbuilt element of its culture from the organization's inception. Their Founder's values and ethos based on trust got embedded in their policies and principles and reflect in their day-to-day business. Their activities are conducive to sustainable social welfare. In fact, they have a musical logo which reflects the sonic essence of the brand and evokes the core values, essence, and persona of the organization. It captures the lively and energetic persona in all its youthful effervescence.

The hiring process in the organization commences with a resource requirement analysis that happens wherein the resources required are to be approved by the senior management. Once the approval is obtained, accordingly the hiring happens. Hiring has both lateral hiring as well as campus recruitments. When it comes to campus recruitments, tier1, tier 2 and tier 3 colleges are considered, although, mostly tier 2 and 3 colleges are opted for. The organization would already be having data of the colleges approached in the past, which would include factors like attrition rates of employees belonging to each campus and performance rates from each campus which acts as a guide in selecting the colleges for placements. Now that the bank has the data, they move ahead and conduct a pre-placement talk. Prior to the actual process date, a senior official from the HR team connects with the aspiring candidates through a pre-placement talk to make them aware about the DNA of the organization covering the various aspects which includes but not limited to the history, evolution, mission, vision, core values, employee proposition, commitment to the society, job description,

career progression plan offered and detailed information on compensation. The queries and points of concerns from the candidate group are addressed through a question-and-answer session, which follows the talk. This helps in improving the brand visibility among the prospective candidate group and makes the expectations of the role clear, even to the students from remote parts of the country who are not otherwise familiar with the brand. This also helps to create a fair idea about the organization and the role offered to every prospective participant. There are standardized talent assessments with fixed eligibility criteria. Although they could vary slightly from one domain requirement to another, by and large the criteria remain the same. Along with the job description and eligibility criteria, a registration link is sent to the placement officer of the college which is later floated among eligible candidates. After registration, the online assessments are scheduled. The online assessments consist of technical assessment as well as a psychometric assessment. The data that is captured from the online tests also include the candidate's family back ground, academics etc. This data as well as the test results are presented to the interviewers. Then there is a group discussion based on a situation analysis. After the Group discussion, there is a Robotic interview which is an asynchronous video interview involving the Big five analysis, as well as a game-based simulation, at the end of which the candidate has a fairly good idea of what exactly to do in his or her job. Finally, the candidate also goes through a face-to-face interview with an interview panel comprising of an executive from HR side and another executive from the business side. where further behavioral assessment is done. Both the interview panelists should have at least 10 years minimum work experience in the organization and all the data from previous tests and interviews would have been shared with them. They identify the potential candidate based on the interview insights as well as all the previous data.

In the case of Lateral hiring, it could be either replacement hires or additional resources. Here, experienced professionals are hired and weightage is given to their technical expertise and skill sets. In the case of a request for additional resources from any of the verticals, an analysis is done to assess the requirement and a job description is also formulated for the role. Based on the job description, the job portals like Naukri.com and Linked in are all checked and once the candidate is identified, the HR connects with the candidate through calls and discussions wherein the various technical as well as other aspects are cross checked to a certain extent. If the candidate is also interested and the role falls within the budget, 2-3 rounds of technical interactions happen. If the candidate clears all these rounds, then an HR interview also takes place. Finally, once all these rounds are cleared, the job offer is made to the candidate.

Moving on to the process of data collection, once the organization was identified from the GPTW list as one of the proposed organizations for this study, a mail was sent to the HR head of the organization, briefly mentioning details of the study along with a request to connect either online or in person. A presentation was made online and once the HR head was convinced about the study; further discussions were done on how best to take it forward. One of the HR managers coordinated the interviews with the participants, all of which were conducted online over a period of one month or so. The interviews were also transcribed simultaneously to the best extent possible. As mentioned in both the earlies cases, the participants were divided into group 1 and group 2. Group 1 consisted of hiring panel members as well as HR team members whereas group 2 included only female participants

who had either undergone promotions in the organization or those who were fresh recruits (completed at least three months but not exceeding one year). Interviews with the participants were transcribed and data analysis was done. Most of the interviews were online due to the constraints posed by the pandemic. The interviews were transcribed and coded. Deductive and inductive coding was done and most of the codes were either descriptive codes or in vivo codes. The codes were gain grouped to form categories,

subcategories, and themes. Below, the researcher explores the various themes as well as the categories that have contributed towards formulating the themes. A summary of the findings in connection to the strategic elements of the research question is also discussed along with the themes.

6.2 Themes & Categories (Group 1)

Theme 1 - Good balance between functional fitment and culture fitment in hiring

This theme responds to the first research question. It indicates a good mix of evaluation criteria in the hiring process in the organization, an integration of both culture as well as functional fitments. The management focuses on both competencies as well as the values of the candidate. The various categories in this theme are 'Structured and standardized hiring process,' 'Culture fitment in hiring,' and 'Functional fitment in hiring.'

Structured and standardized hiring process

One of the participants had described the process as a "smooth hiring process." The entire process was well structured and seem to give equal importance to both culture fitment (values) and functional fitment (competencies) throughout all the stages in the hiring process. According to one of the participants, a group 1 participant, an senior HR team member as well as a hiring panel member who has been with the organization for many years, - "most hiring happens from campuses, identified based on previous data, where online tests (technical and personality assessment), group discussion based on any situation and robotic interview (Big five personality test and technical test) are conducted. After this is the interview …. Lateral hiring also happens where candidates are taken after tests and interviews…a very structured process overall". Again, another respondent who is also an HR team member and a hiring panel member says – "we have a very standard set of talent assessments. We don't deviate in between. Our eligibility criteria are also standardized. There can be minor variations from one resource requirement to another…but, by and large they are standardized."

In the words of another respondents, an HR manager, - "the eligibility criteria are a standard set of norms that is approved by the CHRO prior to every recruitment. First, we receive an approval from the MD and then we place a note to the CHRO and he approves the eligibility criteria. Once the eligibility criteria are fixed, there is absolutely going to be no deviation." These words indicate the structured, clear, and focused nature of the hiring processes. All the group one respondents spoke about the hiring process in the same fashion, sharing similar details, where each of them was well versed with all the process details. "Structured model of campus recruitment," "highly structured lateral hiring," equal opportunity, "AI to assess fitment," values framework, holistic picture of candidate before interview, extensive groundwork to identify campuses, are all some of the codes under this category.

Culture fitment in hiring

The interviews revealed that the organization gave a lot of importance to hiring a good culture fit. According to one of the respondents, a group one participant, hiring panel member and HR team member, - "what we look for is the right kind of attitude, positive mindset, willingness to work hard which is very difficult to

find in today's generation. We see if they have an easy approach to life, to career, whether they are flexible. We follow the Disc model. We also give a lot of importance to ethical values." These words indicate that high levels of significance is associated to the candidate's beliefs, values, attitudes, behavior, and personality. Again, another respondent says – "it's more of a culture value based fit. We have a values framework which is called CARES – i.e.; commitment to excellence, agility, relationship orientation, ethics, and sustainability." This 'values framework', which the respondent very passionately spoke about also reflects the significance imparted to values. Most importantly, having such a framework to ensure that these values are common for all indicates standardization.

Another respondent who is an HR team member says – "once the students join, they have seniors for help. So, even they become accustomed to the culture here and that's the reason they perform. Or they can blend well with the culture. So, in a way, this culture fitment starts with identification of colleges." These words again highlight the high level of importance associated to culture fitment in the organization. Again, another respondent who is also a part of the HR team says- "I have very high regard for this organization. The standards are very high and there are a lot of things the management is taking care to ensure that the hires are of high quality and high fitment." Again, another senior HR panel member spoke at length about the hiring process wherein he mentioned about the online tests in the case of campus recruitment. This test had two parts – technical and a psychometric assessment. In his words – "along with the technical assessment, we also do a personality or psychometric assessment based on the Big Five model where teamwork, sociability, service orientation, resilience, cognitive agility etc of the candidate will be tested for understanding his or her personality." These words indicate that at each stage of hiring, culture fitment is also assessed in one way or the other. Some of the codes that were grouped under this category are – assess fit, approach to life, "functional fit a part of culture fit", family background, "ethical behavior", stability assessed, "able to blend with the culture", "fitment starts with college identification", "hires of high fitment", "culture fit guys with technical excellence", "candidate to have cultural score".

Functional fitment in hiring

Apart from culture fitment, the interviews reveal that an equal amount of importance is also associated to functional fit as an evaluation criterion. According to one of the senior hiring panel members, a group one participant, – "there is a kind of eligibility criteria that we look for in our candidates – they have to be either graduates or post graduates." He continues – "Our online assessment test has a technical part too where we assess the candidate's subject knowledge, reasoning ability, logic etc. Even in our group discussion which is typically a case study based one, we will also assess the candidate's competency, analytical skills, knowledge in Finance etc. Other than personality, some of our assessment indicators are general awareness and basic knowledge on tax and finance." These words clearly indicate that functional fitment is also as important as culture fit in the organization. Each stage of the hiring process seems to be assessing functional fitment too in one way or the other. Again, another respondent, also a senior HR team member says – "all candidates should have 60% marks minimum from their 10^{th} grade onwards …10^{th}, graduation, or post-graduation. That is the minimum criteria. Also, the campuses we approach must have NAAC accreditation.". In the words of another respondent who is a group one participant and a hiring panel member – "In case of previous work experience, we will ask him questions based on that. In case, he has no work experience, then we would ask him to describe how he was performing in his studies…whether he was an active member of any association, academic or otherwise in college. All those." It is very clear that high level of importance is associated to educational qualifications, subject knowledge, previous work experience, other certifications etc. In the words of another respondent, an HR team member – "the candidate must have consistent academic

records of 60% throughout his or her 10th, graduation, and post-graduation. Apart from the psychometric assessment, we also test their quants, logical, and numerical skills, and abilities."

All the respondent interviews echoed similar descriptions of the hiring process. Each interview reconfirmed that both functional and culture fitments are equally important in the hiring process in this organization. In fact, the comment made by one of the respondents was quite amusing - He said, "competencies and knowledge are a part of our culture here and culture is a part of our competencies." These words indicate that the respondent is trying his best to make it clear that both values and competencies are equally significant in the organization. Some of the codes here are "graduates and post graduates," "domain knowledge," industry awareness, "selling skills", leadership skills, previous work experience, academic experience, "members of associations or groups", "tax awareness", technical expertise and skills, "creative agility" etc.

Theme 2 – Good integration of performance and family culture

The interviews reveal a good integration of both performance oriented and family-oriented culture in the organization. This balance, has enabled to imbibe the best from both types of cultures. With the progression of the interviews, this was becoming more and more clear. The categories grouped under this theme that support this theme are described below. These categories are – Founders values, Candidate attributes focusing equally on functional and behavioral aspects, Hiring manager's perceptions on fitment and Family oriented culture. These categories respond to the first research question and research objective on the various organizational elements that shape culture fitment based hiring processes.

Founders Values

Very interestingly, the study suggests that the equal amount of significance attributed to both the behavioral and functional aspects, originated right from the top, as indicated by many of the respondents 'during the interviews. These values set from the top are ingrained in the minds of the employees who abide by them, and assessed in the candidates during the hiring processes. According to one of the senior HR team members who is also a hiring panel member, - "I am associated with campus recruitment. So, you might have read in some of the interviews of our CEO, that the underlying thought in our hiring process is 'hire by will and build by skill'." These words speak volumes about the recruiter's preference for hiring a candidate who is highly motivated and able to perform many generalized functions over one who is highly specialized in a certain area. Again, in the words of another respondent, also a hiring panel member, - "culture is contributed by every stakeholder in the organization, though it originates from the top. Our values framework is communicated from the top to the bottom, in broader platforms, which really inspires the employees in the organization." All these words indicate the significant role this organizational element (founder's values) has on the culture and hiring process in the organization. Some of the codes under this theme are- "the way he nurtured young professionals, "values communicated from top", etc.

Candidate attributes focusing equally on functional and behavioral aspects

As mentioned earlier, the respondent interviews indicate an equal focus on both performance excellence as well as values throughout each stage of the hiring process in the organization. According to a senior hiring panel member, "we go for B tech and M tech and the graduates and post graduates from reputed tier 1,2,3

cities…. that is what we prefer. We also look at the right kind of attitude, positive mindset, willingness to put in effort etc. We also follow the disc model while interviewing apart from the technical questions. Our values framework is also about commitment to excellence, agility, relationship orientation, ethics, and sustainability". Similar narratives were made by all the respondents on the hiring processes wherein they indicated a balanced approach where importance is being given to both "excellence and values." Again, the significance associated to excellence is clear in the words of the respondent – "all should have 60 percentage marks or above from 10^{th} onwards…for 11^{th}, 12^{th} degree, post-graduation…everything. This is our minimum requirement. We also approach colleges that have NAAC accreditation. This is important for us." The respondent added saying- "we will ask about his previous work experience, if that is not there then his/her academic experience, how good they were, whether they have memberships in any associations or groups …all these things are significant ". One of the respondents says – "there are certain primary assessment indicators like personality, general awareness, financial awareness etc. We also follow our values framework which requires high ethics, commitment to excellence, agility, relationship orientation, and sustainability. All these are also assessed at various stages of our hiring process."

All the group one respondents described their hiring process in a similar manner, with their words reflecting the significance associated to both the functional as well as cultural aspects. Some of the codes that support this category are – "graduates", "analytical skills", "high end work experience", "general awareness important", financial awareness, "tax awareness good", "culture fit guys with technical excellence", consistent academic records, "officers to be graduates or post graduates", "clerical associates to be graduates", attitude and behavior, "team work and management skills, "members in associations and groups", "family background", "ethics very important", "high ethical standards", "human in terms of customer service", service oriented etc.

Hiring manager's perceptions on fitment

Some of the various dimensions of this category are perceptions on gender in fitment, perceptions on values in fitment, perceptions on excellence in fitment.

Interestingly, some of the hiring managers expressed their views in a manner that enabled to capture well, what they associated with the term 'fitment'. According to one of the HR team members, also involved in hiring processes, - "we go for the guys who would fit into our culture with the right technical skills. They would have the technical excellency with the right kind of culture scope." Through these words, the respondent has managed to capture the essence of what constitutes fitment in the hiring process. Again, another manager also a part of the hiring panel made clear his views on gender when it comes to fitment. He says – "I go by the job description and look for the skills and other eligibility criteria. I am not bothered about whether the candidate is a male or female. That has never been a filter for me." In the words of another group one hiring panel member – "culture fitment starts right from the identification of colleges. He added – "we have focused so much on talent acquisition, more than almost any other organization. There is no rush to fill numbers here. There is only rush to identify the right potential, that is, one who can steal the organization, who can propel the organization. We have very high standards for our recruits in terms of both high quality and high fitment, technically and behaviorally."

Again, with respect to manager's perceptions on gender in fitment, one of the hiring panel members says: -

"its very simple. Whoever is good, gets a chance. This applies to both males and females. In case of females, I see if she has that thing in her, circumstances might differ, but does she have that thing in her to scale up beyond the needs. That's one thing I keep in mind while interviewing a female candidate. You can call that fitment, culturally or technically." These words reflect clearly the significance associated to both cultural (values) and functional (competencies) aspects of the candidate during the hiring processes. Many a time, the respondent spoke in a manner where culture fitment was getting integrated with functional fitment. There were many more such narratives echoing similar sentiments but worded differently. Another respondent has said – "60% or more in 10^{th}, 11^{th} and 12^{th}, graduation or post grad is a must. If the candidate has previous work experience, that's great. Academic excellence must be there. Some basic general awareness, financial and tax knowledge are all good. Apart from all this, he or she needs to have high ethical standards and needs to conform to our CARES values network". Some of the codes under this category are "domain expertise not a must", "women lack confidence", "positive culture shift in younger gen", "not conscious of numbers", "culture fit is scaling up beyond needs" etc.

Family oriented culture

Another significant category under this theme is 'Family oriented culture'. This reflects in the respondent's description of their organization's culture. In response to the question the factors that motivate the participant in the organization, one of the respondents, a senior hiring panel member says- "One of the important aspects is the family culture or the relationship orientation. We are like a family, a very close-knit family. Its so warm. There is always somebody to help you out. Its like a very big family with lots of people. You are in a crisis, then people are there to run around for you." The respondent continues with a passion – "I had got two or three other opportunities and I had even almost put in my papers to move out, but I could not, because all this is important for me. And, I have never once regretted that decision." These words of the respondent clearly suggest that one of the most significant motivational factors in the organization is this family-oriented culture.

Another respondent. A senior HR team member and hiring panel member says – "There is always a sense of belongingness. The first thing that comes to mind in any situation is this family orientation – that is always there. Once you join the organization, at every juncture, be it good or bad, there is a helping hand from day one and that is really touching. That's my personal favorite thing too". These words indicate how important this family culture is to the respondent. Again, another respondent, an HR team member says – "I never feel like I'm working when I come here. It's like family and its part of my life, its part of my daily routine.
Its not like, 'Oh, I need to go to work". Similar sentiments were echoed by many more respondents. Some of the codes under this category are – " close knit family", "like a family", family culture, "relationship orientation", "like a very big family", "always a helping hand", "this family thing- my favorite", "its like family", "part of my life", "always together like family", "facing crisis like family" etc.

Theme 3 – Hiring manager perceptions revealing absence of bias

This theme responds to the first research question and objective on various organizational elements that shape the culture fitment based hiring process in the organization as well as their influence on the assessment of female candidates. The theme clearly indicates a positive approach on female candidate assessment. The various categories that are grouped under this theme are, 'Absence of gender discrimination' and 'Hiring manager perceptions on female candidates.

Absence of gender discrimination

The group one respondent interviews indicate the absence of any discrimination based on gender in the organization. In fact, hardly any cases of bias were mentioned. The interviews indicate that the same is the status with the group two participants also. This adds more weightage and reconfirms this theme. According to an HR team member also involved in hiring processes, - "We are not conscious of the numbers because we are an organization where the female-male ratio is almost 50/50, something like 48.5% females and 52% males. We don't discriminate on anything here and we give that kind of training to our interview panel members too". Another respondent, also a very senior hiring panel member says – "whoever is good gets a chance here. In fact, we are in a place where female numbers would exceed male numbers soon." These few words itself clearly indicate the strong support and encouragement for female candidates and employees and the absence of any kind of gender discrimination. In fact, this respondent, who is a female herself also adds – "we don't give any preferential treatment for women, if you ask me, it is all based on merit. I have never been given a favorable thing because I am a woman. We must fight just like our male colleagues, hand in hand and prove ourselves and you're there. There are enough and more opportunities for growth here …but, frankly, at times I find that the women themselves lack confidence and they are just not willing to try certain things." These words of the female respondent, also a hiring panel member having undergone promotions in the organization, indicate the absence of any gender discrimination. Her words clearly imply that all the employees are considered equal and its equal opportunities for all. The management was highly supportive and more than happy to have female employees and if at all, any one has any kind of hesitation or reluctance, it would be the female candidate herself and not the management. Similar sentiments were echoed by all the group one participants.

In the words of another respondent, also a hiring panel member, - "if the candidate fits our roles, we will take her/ him. We have absolutely no differentiation there. That's why we have a 60-40 male female ratio as of now…in fact, for clerical staff it is 50-50. This is also why we always have a person from HR with solid experience too in all our interviews. These HR folks would also have undergone anti bias training programs and stuff." These words indicate that not only is there an absence of any gender discrimination, but the management is also very much aware of the benefits of conducting training programs to further increase awareness and avoid any negative situations in future. Again, another respondent, also a senior HR team member and hiring panel member says – "I just go by the job description. I am never concerned about the gender of the resource I am hiring. I only look at the skills and eligibility criteria. Gender has never been a filter for me." Some of the codes under this category are – "female numbers exceeding male numbers," "selection based on merit," "no preferential treatment," "male female proportion not much different," "gender never a filter," "never concerned about gender", 50-50 male female clerical ratio, "don't discriminate" etc.

Hiring manager perceptions on female candidates

This category supports bias free hiring that seems to be happening in the organization. A total open mindset with no signs of any discrimination is evident from the management's side when it comes to female candidates and employees. The experiences of the managers with different female candidates, their thought processes, observation, etc, suggest that although majority of the females are ambitious and ready to accept any role for themselves, there are a few who seem reluctant or apprehensive to take up certain roles (those

roles that require heavy travel), despite the support and encouragement from the managers.

One of the respondents, a senior HR team member and part of the hiring panel narrated an incident wherein they faced a situation wherein the female candidate was very much comfortable to take on a role which involved heavy travel, but unfortunately, the management had issues regarding the budget and was not sure if the female candidate would be fine with the offer they made. But, to their surprise, the candidate readily agreed and took on that role. In the respondent's words – "it happened recently in fact. I spoke to her and she was okay with the role and the business team was also very impressed with their interactions with her. Then, we were not able to make an offer because of the budget side. But then she was okay with our offer though it required a lot of travel." Again, the respondent shared thoughts on the reasons women usually exit their organization. In his words – "The major reason would always be personal. They might be wanting to move with their spouse after marriage. We always try to accommodate most of the cases." This indicates the supportive and encouraging approach of the management towards the female employees/candidates. Another respondent, also a senior hiring panel member adds- "we don't give any preferential treatment for women, if you ask me, it is all based on merit. I have never been given a favorable thing because I am a woman. We must fight just like our male colleagues, hand in hand and prove ourselves and you're there. There are enough and more opportunities for growth here …but, frankly, at times I find that the women themselves lack confidence and they are just not willing to try certain things." These words indicate that the managers consider female candidates or employees to be equal to male candidates or employees in every way. They believe in 'equal opportunities for all.' Some of the codes under this category are: "whoever is good gets chance", "few women lack confidence", "women reluctant to be assertive", "women as capable as men" etc.

Absence of preferential treatment for female candidates/employees

According to a Senior HR panel member (Grp 2) – "Her expectations were totally different and so we didn't take her. If our female candidates are not flexible enough to move around, we don't take them". These words indicate that there is no special consideration provided to the female candidates or employees, however difficult or challenging the task maybe – they are in all ways considered as capable as a male employee, unless the female candidate/employee themselves are reluctant .Again, in the words of another Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "I have never been given any favorable thing because I'm a woman…we have to fight hand in hand with men and prove ourselves here and then you're there". This mindset of the manager is also reflected in the responses of the group 2 participants. According to a Fresh recruit (Grp 2) – "Right in the beginning of the interview itself they told us that they can't guarantee any desired location and that we must be free about relocation". This approach of the management seems to have contributed to the absence of gender bias in the organization.

Cognitive diversity

Few of the responses indicate the fact that the hiring managers are not rigid when it comes to the area of expertise and backgrounds of the candidates. For instance, a Senior HR panel member (female) says – "We are not so particular on domain expertise always as that can be built up later also, but the right attitude, mindset and willingness to put in effort are very important". Again, according to an HR Manager (Group 2) - "Never in my wildest dream did I think I would end up in HR because I'm basically a CS engineer…but I feel they help you really find your niche area! I worked in different branches and now I'm

here". Again, in the words of a Marketing Manager (Grp 2) – "I am from Civil engineering background, but now in Marketing here! This is totally new for me, but I am learning and enjoying my work."

Theme 4 – Strong employee centric business strategy aligned to functional and culture based hiring strategy

Employee motivational factors

The researcher realized that high focus is given to employee welfare and development and many initiatives have been taken by the management to support them. According to one of

the respondents, an HR team member, - "the entire cultural setup itself is very good here. Then we have many programs especially for women like - Maternity Connect -where during maternity period she is given a particular car park area, comfortable seating etc. After maternity leave a 'buddy' would be there to assist her in settling back. We also have a 'Smiles program 'which is an employee assistance program. We also have flexi work hours and work from anywhere options." These words indicate the high focus and support for female employees in the organization. The researcher continues – "the initial package here is very high when compared to new generation banks. Besides all this, the family kind of culture here works really well for everyone".

Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are - "flexi options", "buddy to assist new recruits", "employee assistance programs", "flexi hours", "work from anywhere options", "technical training programs", "high initial package", "management open to feedback", "highly supportive top management", "convenient postings", "transparency in processes", "management accommodative of compassionate cases, "able to find their niche", "sense of belongingness", "no hierarchy", "always somebody to help", "mentoring support", "good peer interaction" etc.

Effective hiring process (Digital aspect, Human aspect)

As mentioned, and described earlier, digital aspect and human aspects are two significant dimensions of this category. One of the categories that support the strong alignment between the business and hiring strategy is the effective hiring process that understands and complements the ultimate goals of the organization which is to be the most admired workplace through devoting balance time and interests to all its stakeholders – employees, customers and shareholders. One of the respondents has mentioned- "'Digital at the fore, human at the core' for effectively managing customer needs." As mentioned earlier – "Some of the codes under the dimension digital aspect are:-"graduates and post graduates", "analytical skills", "high end experience for candidate", "general awareness important", "financial and tax awareness good", "culture fit guys with technical excellence", "consistent academic records", "officers to be graduates or post graduates", "clerical associates to be graduates", "attitude and behavior", "team work and management skills, "members in associations and groups", "family background", "ethics very important", "high ethical standards", "human in terms of customer service", "service minded etc. Again, the culture aspect is supported by codes like – "questions around CARES" focus on ethics, approach to life assessed., approach to career assessed, "relationship orientation", "functional fit as cultural fit", integrity, "ethical behavior most important", "high

rating for culture fitment", "culture guys with technical excellence etc.

Theme 5 – Minimal attrition rates as a result of strong balanced culture and other motivational factors

This theme responds to the latter part of the first research question as well, that is, how the culture fitment-based hiring has influenced assessment of women candidates. It also responds to the second research question on how it has impacted women candidate experiences. The various categories under this theme are Family oriented organizational culture, Organizational interventions, Employee attrition.

Family oriented organizational culture

The family-oriented part of the culture in the organization seems to act as a strong motivational factor for female employees, thus ensuring minimal attrition rates of women in the organization. Excerpts have already been shared above.

Besides the excerpts mentioned above, one of the respondents says, - "There is a certain sense of safety this culture ensures. So, most of our employees, especially female employees stick around for 20 years and all because they feel it is safe like a government job or something". The family-oriented culture seems to be promoting a feeling of safety and security especially to the female employees.

Organizational interventions pro women

According to one of the respondents, a senior hiring panel member, various training programs help to ensure that the hiring panel members as well as other managers are all aware of biases and they are not indulging in any such bias at all. In the respondent words – "Bias awareness training is definitely given to all hiring panel members. They are given a certification also once they complete the program. New hires also go through a two weeks classroom training program followed by an extended e-learning program where we keep in touch with them throughout their probation period. They also get to interact with the CEO which is really a motivating factor for them ". Another respondent also a senior hiring panel member says, - "most of our concern is for females for whom work life balance is very important. We try our best to help them through various family challenges especially the first two years by offering them mentoring support. There is a Smiles program where they can reach out for counselling and support." The respondent continues- "For new mothers, we give them frequent feeding breaks and offers the best possible support to navigate those initial one or two years. So, we have Creche facilities for them and all kinds of support systems in place".
Again, another respondent also a senior hiring panel member says- "We have an employee people assistance program. We have flexi work hours and work from anywhere options if required. We also have programs like Maternity Connect wherein during maternity period, she is given a particular car parking area, comfortable seating position. There is a dedicated person – 'a buddy' who would welcome ger back when she joins after the break and help to get back on track. There are counsellors, psychologists all available whom one can approach anytime. There is also a face-to-face program on Saturdays for this. In fact, candidates and employees get trained on both technical as well as cultural aspects." Some of the codes under

this category are – “hiring experts trained”, bias awareness training”, “hiring certification program”, “training on values”, “training on digital skills”, “informal engagement platforms”, self-learning programs”, “domain and behavioral training” etc.

Employee attrition

One of the major categories that strongly supports this theme is the employee attrition rates as revealed by the group one respondents. According to one of the respondents, a senior hiring panel member, - “we have a very low attrition rate, like two to three people was our average for last two years. Most of these are due to migration reasons. Most of them stick around for

20 years or even more as they feel it is as good as a government job and is safe”. Again, another respondent, a senior HR team member, - “Attrition rate are almost same for our males and females. Its on the lower side, close to 2.5 or 2.4. Its definitely not more than three”. According to another senior hiring panel member, - “in the case of married women, the major reason why there will be any attrition is when they want to move to a place after marriage where their spouse is. In such cases too, we try and manage to accommodate most of the cases.” These words indicate a lot of effort on the part of the management too in ensuring that the employees are retained and attrition rates are minimal in the organization.

Another respondent, also a senior hiring panel member says- “We are not worried about our attrition rates at all. Only last year we had a slight spurt which was mainly due to the pandemic inducing migration. Hardly anyone moved to any other organization within India. In fact, less than 2% attrition only in fact has been happening here.” All the respondents had such similar sentiments to share on attrition. Besides the employees not wanting to leave the organization, especially female employees, it is also clear that lot of initiatives and steps have been taken by the management to ensure minimal attrition in the organization. Some of the codes under this category are – “very low attrition”, “high average length of service”, “not worried about attrition”, “less than 2% attrition”, “lateral hiring exits very low”, “male female attrition almost same”, “female exits for personal reasons”, “early exits due to migration” et

Theme 6 –Mix of Strategic, Agile and Participative leadership styles that support and promote a performance and family-oriented culture

This theme talks about the leadership style in the organization. It responds to the first research question and objective on the various elements that shape the culture fitment-based hiring in the organization. The various categories grouped under this theme Strategic leadership and Agile leadership and Balanced culture. Low female employee attrition, Strong managerial support for female candidates and High employee motivational factors are the dimensions or sub categories of strategic leadership.

Agile leadership

The researcher realized that the leaders or managers in the organization are not only capable of instilling trust in their employees, but also are sticking to transparency in the organization. They mentor and facilitate

budding minds and are open to constructive criticism. Their focus is to fulfil the vision of customers through their employee centric business strategy. They were open to new ideas and possibilities. They not only preached but also firmly believed in practicing what they preached. Few of the excerpts from the interviews that reflect some of these traits are mentioned below.

According to one of the respondents, a very senior hiring panel member, - "If you ask me, I have never been given a favorable thing because I am a woman. We have to fight hand in hand and with all the men around, you prove yourself and you are there. I'm being very frank with you here. This is how my seniors treated me and I'm not just saying this, but also firmly believe in this and adheres to it. This learning has been very valuable for me and the same I pass down to my juniors too." These words indicate that the respondent also manages to practice what she believes in. The respondent herself has also at some point in her career spanning 20 years in the organization experienced it too. Again, the respondent continues –

"the thing that keeps me here or what motivates me the most is the opportunity for growth. If you put in your 100%, there's no limit here. It's a very flat organization, so no need to be worried about glass ceilings and all that. Sky is the limit. With the right kind of effort and hard work you can do anything here. But, you need to stretch from your comfort zone." These words were also very inspiring for the researcher. The researcher could only imagine what a great source of inspiration this respondent must be for her team.

Again, another respondent, a senior HR team member and part of hiring panel says – "During our exit interviews, we listen, review the details of the employee. Where we need to take any action from our end, we are always open to do so." These words indicate the willingness to be open to any form of constructive criticism. Again, in the words of another respondent, also a hiring panel member, - "if you read about the genesis of the bank or if you get a chance to read the biography of our founder, this family spirit is clearly reflected in not just his words, but also in his actions. The way he nurtured young professional…it just speaks volumes about the organization." The researcher realized that these words also reflect a culture in the organization and a style of leading wherein the managers and leaders are not only driving and promoting the change, but, are also being the change. Similar narratives and sentiments were shared by other respondents too. Some of the codes under this category are: "nurtured young professionals", "any action from our end", corrective actions, "not just saying this, believe in improving ourselves". etc.

Strategic leadership

The researcher realized that the management is committed and totally devoted to using their skills and capabilities to help and motivate their team members as well as the organization to attain their long-term goals and to get the best out of any situation. They are open minded, self-aware, good at interpersonal communication... Some of the codes that are grouped under this category are "will take care of you", "believe in improving", "offer something unique to customers", "productive use of time", "financially supporting during pandemic", "many courses offered", "learning will be high", "good opportunities", "employee groomed right from beginning", "advise employees to take care", "freshers well taken care of", "good packages", "organization taking care of employees" and many more. Evidence of strategic leadership is reflected in almost all the themes and their description.

Participative leadership

According to a Senior HR panel member – "We have a feedback mechanism in the organization. Again, coming to feedback from exit interviews, they are reviewed and action always taken where ever required." Again, in the word of another Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "It's a very flat organization with no hierarchy issues. Anyone can approach anyone anytime and management is always open to feedback". These words indicate the openness to feedback on the part of the management. The exit interview feedbacks which offered constructive tips are also valued here. For instance, Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "We pick up a lot of corrective actions based on exits". Another Senior HR Manager says– During exit interviews, we listen to even their personal stuff, give proper attention and if anything can be done about any issue, we do whatever we can..this also helps us to improve". Open communication, another feature of participative style is reflected in the words of a fresh recruit of group 2 - "No lag between I am the officer or he is the regional head …no such gap here, we can discuss freely".

Balanced culture

This has been explained in depth under theme 2.

Theme 7- Challenges in culture fitment hiring

The interviews also reveal that this hiring based on culture fitment, despite the positives, can also be challenging at times. 'Candidate's instant gratification mindset and role perceptions,' and 'Culture embracing high values and competencies equally' are the two categories grouped under this theme.

Candidate's instant gratification mindset and role perceptions

According to one of the respondents, a senior hiring panel member, "Most of the organizations culture will match, but the IIMs, they expect something more than that, in fact, we cannot give, so they move out. When we visited their campuses, we would inform them that you are assigned for this role, but they would want jobs of relationship roles. They mostly would consider this place as a stepping stone only, and most would leave." These words clearly indicate that tier 1 colleges or institutes were not favored much and mostly led to a mismatch of expectations, barring very few candidates or employees. The researcher also noted that this is mostly with respect to fresh recruits at the lower levels. Another respondent says- "Many of these youngsters want the plush and comfort of a bank job, but they are not willing to move out of their comfort zone and take real pain and effort to attain our goals. They talk about big things but when it comes to taking the pain to help out someone, to what extent they will go…they will leave it on the way". The researcher realized that the respondent was talking about 'role perceptions. He or she, typically from the tier 1 institutes would have a certain notion in their mind about a bank job. They might also agree initially to all the role terms and conditions. But, many of them are not able to cope later and end up discontinuing. As in the respondent's words – "when the reality kicks in, kids find it very difficult". This 'misfit' also, according to the respondent, is a challenge in culture fitment-based hiring. Some of the codes under this category are "high candidate expectations challenging", "campus freshers disillusioned with reality", "sheen of banking

career absent" etc.

Culture embracing high values and competencies equally

According to one of the respondents – "Sometimes we do have difficulty, like the candidate will be having the right personality, values more or less same…. but, may be short on competencies. And the other way round also. So, this right mix sometimes can be a bit difficult to get."

6.3 Themes & Categories (Group 2)

As already mentioned in the earlier cases, group 2 consists of only female participants, three fresh recruits (completed at least three months in the organization, but not exceeding one year) and those who have undergone promotions in the organization. The themes have been described below, with verbatim excerpts from the interviews conducted, to support the categories under each theme. Many of the categories or themes further validates the themes under group one.

Theme 1 – Candidate perceptions and experiences reflecting conducive environment for women and smooth hiring

The major categories under this theme are Interview experiences, Company features and reviews attractive for candidate, Management support for female candidates and employees.

Interview experiences

All the candidates unanimously described the interview process as being a very smooth and structured process, with no glitches in between. According to one respondent, a fresh recruit, who has been in the organization for 5 months, - "We had the written test and it was quite easy and after that the GD was there and that was also fine. The team was very good and the support from the team has also helped. And after that was the interview session. In the

interview panel, all the panel members were very supportive and makes us cool. "These words reflect the high level of comfort and ease the candidates felt during the hiring process. Another respondent says – "it was a very simple process and they made us feel very much at ease. We felt free to ask them also any questions we had in mind." All the participants echoed similar sentiments. Some of the codes under this category are: very fair interview process," "very basic questions on banking", very good experience with interviewers", "made me really comfortable", "everything well explained", "if I am comfortable", "happy after everything", "panel members supportive", "interviewers make us cool", "quite a good experience" etc.

Company features and reviews attractive for candidate

Even before applying for the job or after applying and before joining, many of the candidate seemed to have done their background work, which involved checking with whatever sources they could find, about the organization. These reviews enabled them to form a certain perception, which also reflected a very conducive work environment, for both men and women. In the words of one of the respondents who is a fresh campus recruit, and has been in the organization for only 8 months, - "My seniors were already working here. So, I had asked them. Firstly, the culture here is quite different, in the sense, people are very helpful. Even though work is a lot, and it takes time to pick up things, the support we get is really good. This is what my seniors also said and this is one of the first things that attracted me to this place." The respondent continued, full of passion - "I am a very people's person and this matches with my job profile. I need to interact lots with people here. Then, the next factor is the package which is quite a handsome one. Then, the facilities the bank provides to the employees." Few of the codes grouped under this category are –" big brand in banking industry", "pioneer in digital industry", "positive reviews on social media", "lots of learning", "lots of innovation", "dynamic organization", "awarded great place to work", "renowned bank", "good reviews on culture", "people quite helpful", "package quite handsome", "career growth assured", "well known bank", "3-4 senior girls already selected", "career graph explained well", "compliance top level", "takes care of employees", good reviews from ex-employees and more.

Management support for female employees

According to of the respondents, a fresh recruit who has been here for 8 months- "we work completely as a team. Sometimes, if we are short of staff, our manager Mr. X, used to come and help with the verification part and if there's anything will say let me know. So, this is what we want also, we don't want our managers to be all top and like you do everything and I'll just sit around…there's nothing like that. I have worked in companies like ITC and Marico, where the culture is quite different. It is like -I am the boss and I will be ordering you and you have to do the thing. But this is not like that at all. The culture and support we get here are very good." These words reflect the high amount of support and help the management seems to be giving to its employees. Another respondent, also a fresh recruit who has been in the organization for nearly 4 months says –"One thing that I notices is that women here seem to be getting the privilege to have all the big branches . I am also in one of the exceptionally big branches. When it comes to semi-urban areas, people are different and can become difficult to handle and we will crib later. So that is not good. The management already know and understands that, so they think its better to put women in larger branches, which is good for us.

Again, another respondent, who had undergone promotions and been with the organization for almost 4 years says – "I have heard that if you are a married female, the bank will try their best to post you where your spouse is. S, I feel they give a lot of privilege to female candidates and employees. But I am not married till now…yet, when I asked for a transfer to Pune, they gave it and so I am in Pune now. So, these are all good things. Not all organizations will do so much." The responds were clearly full of praise for their management. Some of the codes under this category are "people very helpful", "senior management support in personal crisis", "boss not bossy", "good postings for women", "growth opportunities for us", "very supportive boss", "management motivating", "regular senior management interactions", "current boss for women empowerment", "women's cell, promotions, "work life balance good", "took care like family", "space to express views" and many more.

Theme 2 - Positive employee feedback on organizational culture and low attrition reflecting good culture fitment

The various categories under this theme are Candidate perceptions on culture, Very low attrition and Employee motivational factors

Female candidate perceptions on culture

All the candidates spoke very highly about the culture in the organization which also indicates the fact that they have fitted well into the culture in the organization. According to one of the respondents, a fresh recruit who has completed 5 months in the organization, - "my journey with this bank has been a great learning experience. I feel we have the best culture especially in the banking sector. The staff here is very supportive, even the seniors." She further explained – "I just got a gold medal for academics from my institute and I got a call from the head here as well. It was a two minutes call but it had a great impact on me that I am being valued in the organization, that someone at that high level is calling to congratulate me." These words were very inspiring even for the researcher and the researcher could totally connect with the sentiments of the respondent here. The respondent continued- "Everybody made me feel comfortable. The relationship orientation is very good and the organization wants us to not only build but also manage well and sustain our relationships with customers. The compliance is also very good here. Our culture value mantra launched recently is CARES. We also have to be excellent in every field, flexible, dynamic and agile. WE have to build a good rapport with the customer…not just customer but with each other as well. Not just professionally but personally too. We have a good work life balance. The regular senior management interactions that happen are very inspiring and motivating for us. There is no lag or gap between an officer and a regional head…everyone is very supportive." These words of the respondent kind of summed it up mostly reflecting positive aspects like motivation, appreciation, learning, growth, relationship orientation, family orientation, senior management support and work life balance.

Another respondent who has been there in the organization for nearly four and a half years and undergone multiple promotions says – "They take very good care of their employees, that is the major thing. All the managers in all the branches that I had worked in looked after us like their family. I just feel like, okay, we are in some good place, so we have to keep working well here – and this is what the culture here is all about. We also feel good that we are here and we were able to contribute our best. Its not like you come and work and then just go, it is not like that. These words reflect the amount of satisfaction and motivation the employees feel while contributing their maximum to the organization. All the respondents echoed similar sentiments and thoughts on the organizational culture. Some of the codes under this category

are "good reviews on culture", "very good culture", very supportive culture", "culture values excellence", "really amazing culture", "continuous growth", continuous learning", "like a family", "no stress", "great networking etc.

Very low attrition

The minimal attrition rates in the organization (2-3%) indicates good culture fitment of the employees in the organization. While describing the culture, the respondents of group 2 also mentions that hardly any employee leaves the organization. According to one of the respondents, a female employee who has completed nearly four and a half years in the organization says – "In our bank, I sincerely don't think girls quit their jobs. There are a few who would leave when they get married. But, working for a year and leaving …. that just does not happen here." Another respondent who has worked in the organization for eight months, a slightly fresh recruit says – "In fact, I have not even noticed female colleagues leaving here. One thing I did notice is that women are offered privileges, like, they get mostly posted to all the big branches in cities Also, maternity leave …that even paternity leave happens. But, overall, we are well taken care of. So……". The words of both the respondents reveal that the organization nurtures a very conducive environment for female employees, as a result of which there is hardly any attrition, unless they quit due to personal reasons. Similar sentiments were echoed by all the respondents in group 2.

Another respondent says – "Two of my female friends resigned because they want to go abroad and settle down in life. Other than that, I have never seen anyone leave the organization." These words indicate 'immigration' as one of the reasons for employees leaving the organization. Few of the codes grouped under this category are – "attrition mainly due to immigration," "girls don't quit", "female exits due to personal reasons", "females lacking ambition".

Employee motivational factors

The respondents had so much to speak on factors that were motivating for them in the organization. According to one of the respondents, who has worked for nearly 5 months in the organization, "I think this place has one of the best cultures in the banking sector. The staff here is very supportive, even the seniors. Again, there is always some training program or the other and thus learning is a continuous process in the organization. Everyone is very supportive. We have regular staff meetings to discuss issues and our senior management is always approachable. The promotions are fair and timely and achievements are immediately recognized and awards are given". These words of the respondent reflect the motivational factors that enable them to stick on to the organization

Some of the codes under this category are – "great networking", "family proud of job", "supportive colleagues", "medical expenses reimbursed", "good team", "good culture", "amazing colleagues", "promotions", "growth opportunities", "supportive boss", "senior management very motivating", "work life balance good", "good guidance from bosses", "continuous growth and learning", "can trust them", "take care of employees", "support for handling customer issues etc.

Theme 3 - Good balance between culture fit and functional fit leading to absence of bias

The organizational culture, being a balanced mix between performance and family-oriented culture, also reflects a good balance between functional and culture fitment in the hiring process. The researcher feels this could be responsible for the absence of any gender bias in the organization. This theme is supported by

the categories - Candidate attributes, Female candidate interview experiences and Absence of gender bias.

Candidate attributes

The attributes as highlighted by the respondents during the hiring process seem to be equally focused on both the functional and cultural aspects. The researcher feels that this could be leading to the absence of any gender bias in the organization. According to one of the respondents, - "he asked me very basic questions related to banking, about my back ground, my internship, my academics, current affairs, why I chose this job etc. Then they asked about my location preferences and my family background." All these words indicate the focus of the interviewers. They seem to be looking into both the technical or functional as well as cultural or behavioral aspects. Another respondent says – "GD was like a situation analysis mainly to assess our decision-making skills. They asked very basic things like my qualifications, then, why banking sector after engineering and if I had plans to do higher studies. Basically, they were trying to understand if I would stick on or treat this as a stepping stone. They were also keen to understand my future goals and aspirations."

Another respondent, who has been in the organization for 4 years says – "In the initial interview there were not many questions on core knowledge. They wanted to check the person's attitude whether we are eligible to work in a service industry, my qualifications, background and how I landed up in this job. It was more about my attitude, they wanted to check my attitude. After an MBA in marketing and BSE in Math, they wanted to know why I am keen to join here. They also checked on my family background. Later, during my promotion, they had discussions with me on my growth trajectory, how they are expecting us to grow individually as well as contribute to the organization." Again, these words indicate that the interviewers not only considered the candidate's qualifications, core knowledge etc, important, but also gave importance to the attitude, aims and goals, family background, ability to interact well with customers, relationship orientation etc.

Some of the codes under this category are – "good academic background", previous work experience", "knowledge on current affairs", "good ethics", "commitment to excellence", "agility", "relationship orientation", "ability to connect with customers", "ability to bond professionally and personally", attitude, family back ground, "flexibility", "empathy", stability and commitment, "decision making ability, "ability to handle situations etc.

Absence of gender bias

Interviews revealed the absence of bias in the hiring process. According to one of the respondents, who has been in the organization for nearly eight months – "I have never felt anything bad or anything offensive in the entire process. In fact, the only thing I don't like is the age restriction that is there, not just here but in all banks for certain posts. Otherwise, nothing…" Again, another respondent, who has been in the organization for nearly 5 years says- "I have never felt any kind of unpleasantness or discrimination here. My team members are very supportive, especially my boss who is a lady herself. In fact, in my earlier branch I was probably the youngest employee. All my team mates were very supportive and would

stand by me in case of any customer issue or something. They would even help out with work. Even my boss was very supportive that way." In the words of another respondent who has been in the organization for five months now, a fresh recruit, - "I've never felt any partial behavior and don't think there is any discrimination during the interview or anything. Four people were chosen from our campus, two boys and two girls. There was no partiality or anything…it was very fair."

Again, another respondent who has undergone promotions and been in the organization for three years and nine months and who seemed very vocal about lot of things says – "My position or my work is never on the basis that I am a girl, so I can't do this. No, it has never been like that here. I will not rant about it, but yes, I was doing well in my career and was able to meet up with my superior's expectations. So, it was never a concern for me …this being a girl thing. Maybe there are girls who experience this. I don't know, but till now I have not faced it." According to another respondent, a recent recruit who has undergone 7 months in the organization – "I haven't faced any kind of discrimination in the organization so far. Everyone is so supportive here regardless of gender. The motivation we get from our senior management as well as the internal panel is really great. It is not like we got the job so now we can sit idle. It is not like that. We have to continuously learn and brush up ourselves." These words also indicate the absence of any kind of discrimination in the organization. Some of the codes under this category are - "equal number of males and females selected", "fair interview process", "not faced any discrimination", "everyone supportive regardless of gender", "candidates happy with hiring process", "no unpleasant situation", "no differences at all", "whether this person has stuff or not", "both paternity and maternity leave", "no discrimination", "not faced issues till now" etc.

Female candidate interview experiences

This category has been described earlier under the first theme.

Theme 4 - Management support, absence of gender bias and motivational factors responsible for very low attrition and high inclusivity.

The categories grouped under this theme are Management support for female employees, Absence of gender bias and Employee motivational factors. All these categories have been described earlier under the themes one, four and two respectively.

6.4 Observations and Reflections

Hiring Philosophy, Mission, Values, Founder values and preferences, hiring manager perceptions, Leadership styles, Motivational factor, Accomplishments of candidates/employees, Expectations, Candidate perceptions, business strategy are all organizational elements that contribute to shaping the hiring processes in the organization. Each of these elements has been brought out here in the form of themes derived from categories after coding. The researcher has explained each theme in detail above.

The researcher realized that the organization seems to be having a very thorough process of hiring wherein both technical as well as the behavioral aspects seem to be given equal importance. Both functional as well as the cultural fitment aspects seem to be evaluated at each stage of the hiring process. They seem to be strongly keeping up with their motto – 'Digital at the fore, human at the core.' In fact, during the first visit to the organization itself, the researcher could not help noticing the huge photo framed and displayed on one of the walls in the lobby area. This photo, the researcher was told, was taken during one of the town halls conducted and the entire Mumbai team were there along with their CEO and MD, CHRO and other senior management. It was a beautifully captured picture and reflected the essence of their motto and culture. It was like a family picture. On the other side facing this photo, is a glass shelf where a lot of awards and certificates were displayed. Again, this spoke volumes about their focus on achievements, performance excellence etc. The balance between both – excellence and values, was intentionally or unintentionally reflecting there. The analysis and case description was verified by one of the senior management personnel in the organization.

As the themes suggest, the culture in the organization is a good balance between both performance-oriented culture and family culture. The hiring strategy in the organization complements and supports the culture. The interviews reveal that the management focuses on both functional as well as cultural fitment attributes of the candidate. Their hiring strategy reflects a good balance between both the functional and cultural aspects of the candidate. Their motto – Digital at the for, human at the core, itself is a clear indication of this balance. This hiring strategy of the organization seems to be perfectly aligned to the business strategy which is an employee centric business strategy. The organization believes that maximum productivity can be attained only if the employees in the organization are totally happy and satisfied. The agile and strategic leadership in the organization seems to complement this alignment between the hiring strategy and business strategy of the organization. The researcher could not help feeling impressed by the fact that none of the group one nor group two participants reported any case or instance of any bias or gender bias in the organization. Although, management support for female employees and other motivational factors could have contributed to this absence of bias, the researcher feels that the balanced culture as well as the balance in candidate attributes while hiring, where not just performance and excellence, but also culture and values are equally important, could have majorly contributed to this absence of gender bias in the organization.
This absence of bias as well as the high gender inclusivity could be the reason for the very low attrition rates in the organization - around 3%, including retirement numbers too. Here, the researcher would also like to highlight the fact that despite culture fitment being a very significant evaluation criterion in in the hiring strategy, bias is absent in the organization. This clearly contradicts the controversy around culture fitment as an evaluation criterion, where it says that culture fitment perpetuates bias.

Chapter 7 - Cross Case Analysis & Findings

Merriam (1998) called for multiple case studies to be performed in two steps; first the "within-case analysis" followed by "cross-case analysis." Again, Miles and Huberman (1994) described cross-case analysis as tricky and requiring a careful look at complex configurations of processes within each case. Merriam (1998), concluded that "Ultimately, cross-case analysis differs little from analysis of data in a single qualitative case study". Merriam (1998) eased the process by suggesting that the results could vary from a unified description across cases, meaning that reinforcement was found across cases; to new categories, themes, or concepts; or substantive theory from an integrated framework. In Cross case analysis, the researcher considers in what areas the cases suggest same points, where they differ and where they conflict. In the cross-case analysis, the researcher points out in what areas the three cases suggest the same points, where they differ, and where the three cases conflict. To recap the findings from each group in each case and allow for comparison, the outcomes or themes from each case are used.

7.1 Comparison of Cases

Hiring philosophy, business strategy, hiring manager perceptions, leadership styles, candidate perceptions, founder's values and motivational factors are all organizational elements that play a major role in shaping the culture fitment- based hiring in all the three cases - Case A, B and C. Case A and Case B were compared initially with each other. Based on the themes generated from Case A and Case B, the variations and similarities in different areas are explained as follows:

1. Case A follows a value based hiring philosophy or rather a hiring strategy focusing more on the cultural aspect whereas, Case B seems to follow a hiring strategy focusing on both culture fitment as well as functional fitment, but with more focus on the functional aspect.

2. Case A has a family oriented as well as a service-oriented culture, which is also a reflection of the founder's values. Case B, on the other hand has a highly Performance oriented culture, also a reflection of the Founder's values.

3. Business strategy of Case A is heavily customer oriented. Although business strategy of Case B is also customer centric, Case B seem to be associating equal importance to agility to adapt to changing external as well as technological landscapes. The customer focused business strategy of Case A is aligned to their culture-fitment based hiring strategy. Similarly, the business strategy of Case B is also aligned to their hiring strategy.

4. In Case A, the Hiring Managers perceptions reflected concern for the safety of their female candidates/employees and not gender bias. This is further supported by the narratives of the female employees themselves (Group 2 participants). However, in Case B, the hiring managers perceptions

revealed divergent views on bias. Their words reflect the prevalence of bias, including instances of gender bias. The experiences of the female candidates/employees (Group 2 participants) also reflect dissatisfaction.

5. Case A employers followed a transformative and participative style of leadership whereas Case B employers seemed to be more of a pace setting and coaching as well as a participative leadership style. The leadership styles of both the organizations perfectly complemented their respective cultures, hiring strategy as well as business strategy.
6. In Case A, according to the hiring managers (Group 1 participants), perceptions of the candidates suggest minimal apprehensions and hardly any mismatch of expectations. According to the hiring managers, the candidates seem comfortable and are at ease with the transparent communication and pleasant interactions. However, not much is shared on the same by Case B or Case C hiring managers.
7. The conducive and supportive work environment for female employees facilitate low female employee attrition in Case A, whereas, senior management that strongly supports DEI ensures gender balance in attrition in Case B.
8. Both cases report minor challenges in culture fitment based hiring.
9. The shared mission as well as the cognitive diversity in hiring, facilitates a bias free hiring process in Case A, whereas more focus on functional fitment in hiring seems to be contributing to the dissatisfaction and few instances of bias reported in Case B.
10. The strong gender sensitive culture seems to facilitate high gender inclusivity in Case A whereas a Senior management team led by their CHRO focusing, supporting and promoting DEI seems to be the primary factor responsible for gender inclusivity in Case B.

Here, both Case A & B reflects good gender inclusion. In both the cases, female employee attrition levels are not high, but low in Case A and gender balanced in Case B. Both organizations focus on culture fitment while hiring (although functional fitment is more important in Case B). Both cases report minor challenges while indulging in culture fitment hiring. However, the cases, as mentioned above, vary in terms of the type of culture, the hiring philosophy they believe in, the business strategy each follows, their hiring manager perceptions as well as the leadership styles.

Moving on, Case A and Case Care compared and similarities and differences are highlighted as follows:

1. Case C focuses on hiring philosophy/strategy where there is good balance between culture fitment and functional fitment whereas, as mentioned earlier, Case A focuses on a values-based hiring philosophy.
2. Case C reflects a good integration of Performance oriented and family-oriented culture. Case A reflects a family-oriented culture.

3. Case C follows a strong employee-based business strategy that seems to be perfectly aligned to their functional and culture fitment based hiring strategy, whereas Case A follows a customer focused business strategy, also aligned to their culture fitment based hiring strategy.

4. The hiring managers perceptions in Case C suggests the absence of any form of bias, including gender bias. Similarly, no instances of gender bias are reported in Case A either. This is supported by Group 2 participants constituting only female employees, in both the cases. The hiring managers perceptions in Case A suggests that the apprehensions very few of the managers seem to have while hiring female candidates for job profiles that involved heavy travel, especially in rural areas, is only because of their concern for the safety of female employees. However, if the candidates themselves were in favor of such roles, the managers are more than happy to recruit them and support them.
5. The female employee attrition rates are minimal in Case C as a result of the strong balanced culture as well as other motivational factors. Case A also reflects low female employee attrition levels facilitated by the conducive and supportive work environment.
6. Case C reflects a combination of strategic and agile leadership styles that supports and promotes a performance and family-oriented culture whereas Case A reflects a combination of transformative and participative leadership style.
7. Again, both Cases report minor challenges in culture fitment-based hiring.
8. A good balance between culture fitment and functional fitment in hiring seems to ensure the absence of any gender bias in Case C whereas the shared mission and promotion of cognitive diversity in hiring seems to ensure bias free hiring process in Case A.
9. Strong senior management support upholding founder's high ethics and values, absence of gender bias and various motivational factors ensure low female attrition and high gender inclusion in Case C. The gender sensitive culture (founder's values) facilitates high gender inclusivity in Case A.

Here, again, both Case A & C reflect good gender inclusion. In both the cases, female employee attrition levels are not high, but low/lower than male employees in Case A and minimal or negligible in Case C. Both organizations focus on culture fitment while hiring. Both cases report minor challenges while indulging in culture fitment hiring. However, again, the cases, as mentioned above, vary in terms of the type of culture, the hiring philosophy they believe in, the business strategy each follows, as well as the leadership styles.

Case B and Case C are now compared to highlight the differences and similarities.

1. As mentioned earlier, Case B follows a hiring strategy where functional fitment is given more focus than culture fitment whereas Case C ensures a good balance between both culture fitment and functional fitment in their hiring processes.
2. Case B reflects a high-performance oriented culture whereas Case C has a good balance between

performance oriented and family- oriented culture.

3. The hiring manager perceptions in Case B suggest divergent views on bias including gender bias. The hiring manager perceptions in Case C suggest the absence of any gender bias in the organization.
4. The business strategy of Case B which focuses on customer centricity and agility to adapt to changing external and technological landscapes seems to be aligned to their hiring strategy. Case C follows a strong employee-based business strategy which also seems to be in perfect alignment with their hiring strategy.
5. The leadership style in Case B seems to be a combination of Pace setting, Coaching and Participative styles where as in Case C, it seems to be a combination of Strategic, Agile and Participative styles of leadership.
6. The strong senior management team led by their CHRO which promotes and supports DEI facilitates gender balanced female attrition levels through their anti-bias initiatives and other motivational and awareness programs. The strong balanced culture upholding the founder's values ensure minimal female attrition levels in Case C.
7. Both Case B and Case C reports minor challenges in culture fitment- based hiring.

Here, again, both Case B & C reflect good gender inclusion. In both the cases, female employee attrition levels are not high, but gender balanced in Case B and minimal or negligible in Case C. Both organizations focus on culture fitment while hiring, although Case B focuses slightly more on functional fitment. Both cases report minor challenges while indulging in culture fitment hiring. As in the earlier cases, they vary in terms of the type of culture, the hiring philosophy, the business strategy each follows, their hiring manager perceptions as well as the leadership styles.

This cross-case analysis reveals culture fitment-based hiring does not seem to be leading to any bias in both Case A and Case C. In fact, Case B which focused more on functional fitment, seem to be reporting instances of bias, including gender bias. This is also supported by the group 2 participants of Case B that include only female employees recently recruited or who have undergone promotions in the organization. The study suggests that rather than a focus on 'values' during hiring and other selection processes, focusing purely on or focusing more on the functional aspects could be a reason for triggering biases in the hiring and selection processes. This also could be an explanation for Case B reporting instances of bias, including gender bias. Again, the prevalence of these biases in Case B are supported by both the groups - 1 & 2. Despite the variations in the culture, the female employee attrition levels remain low for Case A and Case C and gender balanced attrition is observed only in Case B (performance-oriented culture). Again, it is important to note that Case C which follows a good balance between both culture and functional fitment has no cases of bias reported and also has minimal female employee attrition. The hiring strategy, business strategy and leadership styles in each organization complements their respective cultures.

As research progressed, matrices were used to bring together and analyze the data collected. These

matrices not only enabled to make the data collection more systematic, it also enabled verification and encouraged comparability. Some of the important matrices are displayed here.

The Data accounting sheet shown below reveals the number of people talked to within a position category. The first line shows the total number of people interviewed within each position category.

Data Accounting Sheet:

	Case A		**Case B**		**Case C**	
Category	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
Total interviewed	**12**		**13**		**13**	
Manager level – 22 Assistant VP – 2 Associate VP - 1 VP – 2 CHRO – 2 Management Trainee – 1 HR Practitioner – 1 Officer – 4 Regional Business heads – 3	1.Senior Manager – HR Team	1. Manager L&D	1.Senior HR Manager	1.Manager	1.HR Talent acquisition & Deployment (VP-HR)	1.Officer – Marketing Dept
	2. Area Manager – Hiring panel member	2. Credit Manager	2. Deputy Manager	2. Manager & CEO secretary	2. HR Talent development & Training (VP – Training)	2.Officer – Sales Dept
	3. Regional HR Manager – HR team member	3. Head – Business Excellence	3. Senior Manager - HR	3. Assistant Manager	3. HR Talent acquisition & Deployment (AVP – HR)	3.Officer
	4. Zonal Manager – Hiring panel member	4. Strategy & Marketing manager	4. VP & Head – Annuity business	4. Officer	4. HR Talent acquisition & Deployment - Manager	4. Manager
	5. Regional Business head – Hiring panel member	5. HR Manager	5. Senior Manager - HR	5. Manager	5. HR Talent acquisition & Deployment - Manager	5. Assistant Manager
	6. Senior Manager – Hiring panel member	----------	6. HR Practitioner	6.Management Trainee	6. Associate Vice President - HR	6. Manager
	7. AVP & Head – Human Resources	…….	7. CHRO	----------	7. President & CHRO	-------

In order to understand the reactions to two major domains in this study, Role order matrices have been used. They display the first reactions or views of the 'role occupants' on gender bias and organizational culture. The data entered in each cell of the matrices is a brief summary of what the researcher found for each respondent (Group 1 hiring managers and Group 2 Female candidates) in the coded field notes as well as transcripts. These matrices gives us a birds eye view of the perspectives of the role occupants.

Role Order Matrix 1
First reactions to 'gender bias in hiring' & culture

Case A		**Interview experiences** **Gender bias in interviews**	**Culture experiences** **Thoughts shared on company culture**
Hiring Managers (Group 1)	H1	Never indulge in any biases, always go as per data and capability of candidate	Very good organization….good brand, employees humane, passionate about work, confident and comfortable about the company
	H2	Strict no, it's a strict mandate that would cost them their jobs	More of a family….like a big start up where you have liberty to innovate and speak up
	H3	Never shown any discrimination…no doubts about it for sure	Culture brought up by Founder where every time he speaks, he says we are a family
	H4	Never seen any partial stuff, in fact, prefer to have mix gender…more female employees on board	Could say in only one word….this is not a company, this is family.
	H5	There is nothing like 'only for men' or 'only for women'… just take the best fit.	DK3 Family culture truly motivates ….but sometimes it is dangerous also
Female candidates (Group 2)	F1	Very good experience….. no discrimination and no issues	Culture wise very good, acceptance is there and no work life balance issue
	F2	Very healthy discussion ……it was very good	Like one family, gel well
	F3	Never experienced nor come across any such situation and never felt any biasness between female and male	Feel so blessed to be working in such a company…. Kind, simple, hardworking people and beautiful to see the lengths that they would go to
	F4	Very smooth process, completely relaxed, more of a chat ….. not experienced anything untoward	We are a family actually
	F5	Completely relaxed process	Very understanding team and good work life balance

DK -Don't know DK1 – Question not asked of informant DK2 – Asked, but not answered DK3 – Ambiguous answer

Role Order Matrix 2
First reactions to 'gender bias in hiring' & culture

Case B		**Interview Experience** **Gender bias in interviews**	**Culture experience** **Thoughts shared on co culture**
Hiring	H1	There is bias …as the incident around a female candidate who had taken a sabbatical for a slightly long	Company consciously gives importance to values, but performance and high levels of digitalization is very

Managers (Group 1)		period before rejoining shows	important
	H2	Have seen biases happening, not just in the interviews and not just gender bias but other forms of bias like industry bias	As a culture, company looks for people who stick with the organization and are able to perform better
	H3	Seen it happening, but not yet occurred in connection with him.	Encouraging and growth oriented culture has worked well for both manager and many other people.
	H4	Not seen any gender bias in this organization.	DK3 No frills, less flashy kind of a plaver
	H5	DK3 There could be cognitive biases that are brought to the table…hidden biases.	DK2
Female candidates (Group 2)	F1	Pretty much smooth, able to handle well. Both interviewers wanted females and they didn't seem to have any bias.	Culture is good, unable to think anything negative
	F2	Recently happened with a colleague where seniors already had it in their minds to take one particular person only…other candidate equally efficient but she was not selected	DK3 Work life balance is not bad, but, it is a good brand
	F3	Wouldn't have joined if had sensed any unfairness	Very professional, but gives importance to personal life as well
	F4	Not felt any bias personally, but wouldn't want to generalize that statement	As far as this company is concerned, culture starts with the brand
	F5	Happened to a colleague whose interview initially got cancelled reason being her document had too many spelling mistakes	Have corporate culture where there is professionalism as well as warmth of employee well being

DK -Don't know; DK1- Question not asked of informant; DK2- Asked, but not answered; DK3- Ambiguous answer

Role Order Matrix 3
First reactions to gender bias in hiring and culture

Case C **Interview experience** **Culture experience**
Gender bias in interviews **Thoughts shared on co culture**

Hiring Managers (Group 1)	H1	Don't discriminate based on anything, in fact, training on the same is given to the interview panel members.	Value systems our culture embraces are very good and starts from our Founder
	H2	Bias not there in hiring processes as there is no significant difference in the proportions of male-female in this organization.	First thing that comes to mind is the family orientation and that sense of belongingness.
	H3	No discrimination at all in the current hiring process…importance always given to skills.	Never feel as if one is working when in the organization – its like family and never been a strain or pressure.
	H4	Not sure if it can be called a bias as the female candidate herself was reluctant to take up	Growth opportunities and the family culture are two things primarily responsible for long term employee

		the job.	commitment. (female)
	H5	There is no discrimination as can be seen from the clerical staff male female ration itself which is 50-50	Equal opportunities for all performing employees and full support and convenient postings all explain experience of 40 years in the organization
Female candidates (Group 2)	F1	Never felt anything as such to be offended or something	Really amazing culture….the only reason to be in this organization could be this culture
	F2	Does not think there is any bias as equal number of boys and girls were chosen after interviews.	Got one of the best cultures, especially in the banking sector.
	F3	No unpleasant experiences ….our team members as well as senior management are highly supportive	Good working environment….business part is different and working part is different with due consideration for employee emotions
	F4	Never had to face any discrimination because of being a girl, been lucky so far.	Learning and growth, good networking, support even during personal crisis…all explain the reason for still being in this organization.
	F5	The interviewers were looking at only knowledge and capability and there was no room for any bias here	Fascinated by the culture…observed and learnt that its not just about 'us', but about the organization as a whole
	F6	Never felt any difficulty at any point of time.	Very helpful people and all considered equal here

DK -Don't know DK1 – Question not asked of informant DK2 – Asked, but not answered DK3 – Ambiguous answer

Moving ahead, to understand better few of the major domains of interest in this study, a Checklist matrix was also prepared. Ratings have been given to suggest an overall adequacy judgement by the researcher and summary phrases/ direct quotes from the interviews have also been added to justify and illuminate the ratings.

Checklist Matrix 1:
(1st Research question – Organizational elements shaping Culture Fitment Hiring process)

Conditions	Case A	Case B	Case C
Founders Values	Very strong 'Transforming lives of our customers is soul stirring and more rewarding than any salary' and we as a family, believe in that.	Strong 'Our tagline is sar uthake jiyo. That is embedded in each of us and it has a long legacy'	Very strong 'Our bank today owes a great deal to the vision of this great man who instilled in his family a passion for growth and sacrifice for common interest'
Hiring philosophy	Very strong 'its all about passion – passion to serve the underserved' with integrity and one has to have it.'	Strong 'Have had cases where we like the candidate, but culture perspective not in place /somebody fits from cultural, skill or competency perspective, but have not handled scale.	Very strong 'Management here takes care to ensure that our hires have high quality competencies and skill sets and are also high fit into our culture'
Hiring strategy	Very strong	Strong	Very Strong

	'Want our candidate to have the basic knowledge and most importantly, should be able to mingle well with the customer in rural areas, like a family member	'We believe in a science-based evaluation. We look for data- data is performance history, promotional data, attrition data	Hiring is based on our values network – CARES, which is commitment to excellence, agility, relationship orientation, ethics and sustainability- hire by will and built by skill - a good balance
Hiring manager perceptions (on culture fitment)	Very Strong 'Respect for one's own family is a benchmark for candidate's respect for the organization.'	Strong 'From a culture point of view,we try to understand their priorities in life – things they are proud of, any notable key accomplishment….	Very strong 'We look for that right kind of attitude, positive mindset and willingness to put in that effort'
Leadership	Very Strong 'you give me blood, I will give you freedom'	Very Strong 'Driving results, seizing opportunities, focusing on innovations and setting higher goals geared to organizational objectives'	Very strong 'Creating a culture of high ethics and excellence in the bank'
Motivational factors	Strong 'Whenever there is a challenge, personal or work related to any employee, the organization stood with him/her very strongly'	Strong 'Strong top down approach in DEI promotion'	Very Strong 'Any personal/professional issue, bank is with the employees'
Business strategy	Very strong 'Customer centricity is the biggest value of our company'	Strong 'Customer focused with equal focus on agility and technology'	Very Strong 'Developing a 'We' attitude among employees (employee centric)
Organizational interventions	Adequate 'Continuous team meetings, town halls, and continuous questioning of those things will improve the status quo (rigid out dated perspectives of any employee)	Very strong Great D&I initiatives, Employee engagement activities, awareness programs, incentives, overall practices addressing and controlling employee attrition	Strong 'Provide various support systems to cope with professional and personal challenges'

None – weak -adequate – strong – very strong

Check list matrix 2:

(2nd research question – Factors supporting gender inclusivity)

Conditions	Case A	Case B	Case C
Senior management support	Strong 'Not like an organization, but treated like family'	Very strong Very open and supportive senior management highly enthusiastic about D&I	Very Strong 'top level management highly supportive and thus we are able to retain and sustain our culture'
Hiring manager perceptions pro female candidates	Very Strong 'Female employees are more systematic and create better culture and discipline'.	Strong 'Pro towards engaging female professionals – personal conviction that female employees can multitask better than males.	Very strong 'No preferential treatment for women, but, does she have that thing in her to scale up beyond needs - she has our full support – sky is the limit'
Absence of gender bias	Very Strong	Weak	Very Strong

	‘Never felt any discrimination and that is for sure’	‘The other candidate is equally efficient ,but not selected.’	‘If he/she fits into the role, he/she gets selected’
Motivational factors	Very Strong ‘Any professional/personal crisis, organization always stood with the employee’	Strong Good learning experience and interesting roles	Very Strong Opportunities for growth as well as our family culture

None – weak -adequate – strong – very strong

ANTECEDENTS OF CULTURE FITMENT HIRING

SITE **Impacts** **Case A**	Type of Culture: Family Orientation	Type of Culture: Performance Orientation	Hiring Philosophy: Cultural Fitment	Hiring Philosophy: Functional Fitmen	Other Supportive Elements: Sr Mgmt Support	Other Supportive Elements: Participative leadership Style	Other Supportive Elements: Motivational Factors	Other Supportive Elements: Business Strategy
No Gender Bias	High →	Low - - ▸	Low - - ▸	High →	High →	Moderate →	High →	Moderate - - ▸
Lower Female Attrition	High →	Low - - ▸	Low - - ▸	High →	High →	Moderate →	High →	Moderate →
High Inclusivity	High →	Low - - ▸	Low - - ▸	High →	High →	Moderate →	High →	Moderate →

Case B

Gender bias	Moderate - - ▸	Very high →	Very High →	High - - ▸	Very high - - ▸	Moderate - - ▸	High - - ▸	Moderate →
Balanced attrition	Moderate - - ▸	Very high - - ▸	Very High - - ▸	High - - ▸	Very high →	Moderate - - ▸	High →	Moderate - - ▸
High inclusion	Moderate - - ▸	Very high - - ▸	Very High - - ▸	High - - ▸	Very high →	Moderate - - ▸	High - - ▸	Moderate - - ▸

Case C

No Gender Bias	High →	High - - ▸	High - - ▸	High →	High →	Moderate →	High →	High →
Minimal attrition	High →	High - - ▸	High - - ▸	High →	High →	Moderate →	High →	High →
High inclusion	High →	High - - ▸	High - - ▸	High →	High →	Moderate →	High →	High →

Need to show remote (- - ▸) and immediate causes (→)

In order to understand the extent to which gender inclusion as well as culture fitment hiring are present in each case, a conceptual matrix is displayed below. This matrix enables the researcher to bring together the major items that are conceptually related in the research questions. The themes that have been used to build the cells are Gender inclusion and Culture fitment hiring. The various subthemes have been entered respectively under each theme and scaling of the subthemes have been done.

Conceptual Matrix:

Culture Type	Gender Inclusion				Culture fitment hiring			
	Hiring Manager perceptions pro female candidates	Absence of Gender bias	Senior mgt support	Organizational interventions	Founder's values	Hiring philosophy	Hiring strategy	Hiring mngr perceptions pro culture fitment
Family oriented (Case A)	Very Strong	Very strong	Strong	Strong	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong
Performance Oriented (Case B)	Strong	Weak	Very strong	Very strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
Family oriented & Performance oriented (Case C)	Very strong	Very strong	Strong	Strong	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong

Very strong – Strong – Adequate – Weak - None

This conceptual matrix indicates the presence of an outlier case (Case B). In fact, the antecedent's matrix also reveal variations in Case B when compared to Case A & Case C. The two balancing factors in Case B that seemed to have played a major role in ultimately balancing the attrition rates and securing a place in the GPTW list of 2021-22 seems to be the presence of 'very strong senior management support' as well as 'very strong organizational interventions.' These two factors seem to have been responsible for minimizing the impact of the biases, so that the female attrition rates/ gender inclusivity remains at least 'gender balanced, as against 'low female attrition' and 'minimal female attrition' in Case A and Case C respectively.

It is interesting to note that the type of culture in both Case A and Case C is a family- oriented culture whereas Case B has a performance- oriented culture. Again, as indicated in the Antecedents matrix, both Case A and Case C, which indulge in culture fitment hiring, stands high on gender inclusivity. Here, the researcher would also like to stress on the suggestion that culture fitment hiring, despite the conflicting views around the concept, does not seem to be having any negative impact on gender inclusivity as indicated by Case A and Case C. However, the 'culture type' could be a cause for concern.

7.2 Propositions

The findings derived are highlighted here as propositions. Each proposition aims to capture the core insights derived from the study.

- **P1** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, the greater the alignment of the culture fitment hiring process to organizational elements like founder values, hiring philosophy, hiring strategy, hiring manager perceptions, leadership style, business strategy and senior management support, the greater would be the gender inclusivity in the organization.
- **P2** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring**,** founders' values that reflect a greater emphasis on values (family-oriented culture), OR, an equal focus on values and competencies, AND cognitive diversity, would ensure greater levels of gender inclusivity.
- **P3** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, the greater the alignment of hiring philosophy to the founder values, with focus on value congruence, cognitive diversity AND the absence of any preferential treatment for women while prioritizing mutual respect and their capabilities – the greater would be the gender inclusivity in the organization.
- **P4 -** In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, the greater the alignment of hiring strategy to the founder values and hiring philosophy, reflecting an absence of preferential treatment for women while prioritizing mutual respect & their capabilities – the greater would be the gender inclusivity in the organization
- **P5** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, the greater the alignment of hiring manager perceptions to the absence of any preferential treatment for women while prioritizing mutual respect and their capabilities, greater would be the gender inclusivity in the organization.
- **P6** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, the greater the levels of participative style of leadership, greater would be the level of gender inclusivity in the organization.
- **P7** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, greater the focus of their business strategy on soft skills (customer-oriented business strategy) or internal stakeholders (employee centric business strategy), greater would be the gender inclusivity in the organization.
- **P8** – In organizations implementing culture fitment hiring, greater the focus of senior management in promoting D&I, greater would be the gender inclusivity in the organization.
- **P9** – The greater the alignment of culture fitment hiring with the organizational elements, like founder values, hiring philosophy, hiring strategy, hiring manager perceptions, leadership style, business strategy and senior management support, the lesser would be the gender bias in the hiring process in the organization.
- **P10 -** The greater the alignment of culture fitment hiring with the organizational elements, the greater the gender inclusivity and lesser the female attrition in the organization.

7.3 Theoretical contribution

- Culture fitment in hiring is a very significant evaluation criterion that can have a positive influence on gender inclusivity in organizations as only certain 'types of cultures' seem to be perpetuating bias/gender bias. The 'type of culture' could be a cause for concern and not 'culture fitment'. Hence, the influence of culture fitment- based hiring on gender inclusivity depends on the 'type of culture'

in the organization

- For culture fitment based hiring to be effective, the hiring process needs to be aligned with organizational elements like Hiring philosophy, founders' values, hiring strategy, business strategy, hiring managers perceptions on culture fitment, senior management support and organizational interventions.
- Key organizational elements that influence gender inclusivity in an organization are hiring manager perceptions pro female candidates, gender bias, senior management support and motivational factors
- Focusing on creating a logical balance between culture fitment and gender inclusion, taking into consideration the organizational elements that influence culture fitment hiring and gender inclusion, will enable organizations to maximise their return on investment in hiring efforts.
- In culture fitment based hiring, although a strong focus on 'values' (family oriented culture) would contribute positively towards mitigation of biases, a good balance between values (family) and competencies (performance oriented culture), where both are equally significant, would ensure negligible biases, minimal attrition as well as high gender inclusivity in the organization. Participative leadership style along with other style/s of leadership aligned to the organizational culture and hiring manager perceptions that support the absence of any preferential treatment for women are other factors that contribute positively towards gender inclusivity in an organization.
- Lack of clarity around the concept of 'culture fit' as an evaluation criterion, the term 'culture fit' being open to interpretation in each organization, unsuccessful efforts in formalising culture fitment hiring practices, limited empirical research on the role of culture fitment in hiring, limited studies on culture fitment and gender inclusion were all challenges at the beginning of this study. Through the research questions, this study responds to and clarifies the aforementioned challenges and offers a framework to address the open interpretation of culture fitment, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the concept in an organizational context.

Chapter 8 - Discussion

8.1 Overview

The main purpose of this study was to explore and understand how culture fitment processes unfold in organizations and how it shapes gender inclusion. Here, the researcher has tried to understand how the managers conceptualize culture fit and how culture fitment-based hiring could be influencing gender inclusivity in organizations. As already mentioned, there are conflicting views on the influence of culture fitment- based hiring, where despite some views which are pro culture fitment- based hiring, there are some which states that it perpetuates bias. Besides, hardly any studies in the Indian context has examined both these constructs (culture fitment hiring and gender inclusion) together. This clearly indicates the need and relevance of this study, wherein the researcher is trying to explore and understand culture fitment hiring and its impact on gender inclusion. In this chapter we create a connection between the findings of this study, the process of culture fitment- based hiring and gender inclusion. By linking them, the researcher not only addresses the research questions but also contributes towards a discussion on how organizations can overlook the conflicting views around culture fitment- based hiring and attain gender inclusivity while indulging in culture fitment- based hiring.

Here, the researcher explores the various organizational elements that play a role in shaping culture fitment-based hiring processes All these elements seem to be interconnected and influencing each other in some way or the other. Although the goal of a multiple case study design is not generalization, Stake (2000) explains that it is sometimes difficult to separate commonalities that emerge during data analysis and generalizations are impossible to avoid. Again, as mentioned by Eisenhardt (1991), multiple case study designs allow replication between cases and is therefore seen as a means of corroboration of propositions. Although the study initially seemed more inclined towards the philosophical realm of Stake (1995, 2000,2005), which talks about constructivist assumptions and aims to investigate the social construction of reality and meanings, it gradually shifted towards the standards of Eisenhardt (1989,91). Here, the researcher has followed the standards provided by Eisenhardt (1989.91) and Graebner (2007) wherein the research questions stem from a research gap, as mentioned earlier. In all the three cases studied, the Hiring philosophy, founders' values, hiring strategy, business strategy, hiring managers perceptions on culture fitment, are all dominant elements that seem to be very strongly influencing the culture fitment-based hiring processes. Again, hiring manager perceptions pro female candidates, gender bias, senior management support and organizational interventions seem to be very strongly influencing gender inclusivity in the organization. Through the findings, the researcher has brought together the major items that are conceptually related in the research questions. The inter relationships between these elements has been explored here, which has helped to develop propositions for further investigation.

As in this study, previous studies on culture fitment hiring (Tholen, 2023), also considers organizational fit to be a very crucial criterion in the hiring process and suggests that organizational fit is open to interpretation and definition within each organization offering the employers the opportunity to shape the hiring criteria according to their interests. The researcher feels that this study has gone a step ahead and

seems to be offering a more in-depth and clear understanding of the organizational elements that shape culture fitment based hiring processes, suggesting that, 'the interests of the employers' (Tholen, 2023) need to be based mainly on organizational elements that include the founder's values, hiring philosophy, hiring strategy, hiring manager perceptions and business strategy in each organization. The confusion over what culture fit is has given rise to several common misconceptions (Judge & Hofman, 2019). When executed correctly, hiring for culture fit ultimately enriches diversity instead of hindering it (Judge et al., 2020). Meta analyses have found that people whose values are more aligned to that of their organizations are more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to the organization and less inclined to leave (Judge & Hoffman, 2019). Again, Rothberd (2015), says – 'there are good reasons to screen for employees who would fit in culturally, depending on whether and how it gets defined. When people who don't fit in get selected, they don't enjoy the experience and they leave'. All these studies indicate the high significance that needs to be associated to culture fitment. It also supports the findings of this study by stating that if executed well, it would play a positive role in shaping diversity and inclusion.

There seems to be a basic structure common to all the three organizations in this study indulging in culture fitment- based hiring:

- A certain 'type of culture' for each organization wherein the major culture characteristics originate from the Founders' values
- Hiring strategy that stems from the hiring philosophy that is an extension of the Founders' values
- Business strategy aligned to the hiring strategy
- Leadership style/s that complement the business and hiring strategy
- Either the presence or absence of bias/gender bias leading to low, gender balanced or minimal female attrition which is a reflection of gender inclusivity in the organization.

As mentioned earlier, the cross-case analysis has enabled the researcher to identify replication in Case A & Case C whereas Case B seems to be the outlier. The replication logic here has helped to reconfirm and modify or extend the findings of some of the previous studies favoring culture fitment- based hiring. The findings of this study suggests that for culture fitment- based hiring process to be effective, it needs to have a very strong link with the various organizational elements like Founder's values, Hiring philosophy, Hiring strategy, Hiring manager perceptions and Business strategy. The findings also suggest that the influence of culture fitment- based hiring on gender inclusivity depends on the 'type of culture' in the organization. Again, apart from culture fitment in hiring, gender inclusivity is also influenced by elements like the hiring manager perceptions pro female candidates and employees, gender bias, senior management support for female candidates/employees and other organizational interventions. The results of this study indicate that some organizations have a very effective culture fitment -based hiring process, whereas some are yet to attain similar levels of effectiveness. This could be mainly due to the fact that the various organizational elements, as identified in this study, are not as strongly linked as they probably should be to the culture fitment practices in the organization. It could also be that the proportions of evaluation criteria (values and competencies) they associate significance to, might not exactly be favorable to promote an effective culture fitment hiring process.

8.2 Comparison with previous studies

Value-based hiring philosophy and gender inclusion

The findings of the study also bring to light other relevant subthemes which are closely linked to culture fitment-based hiring, especially common between the two cases of replication. This study confirms the findings of the previous and recent studies done on the benefits of adopting a value-based hiring philosophy which seem to be having a positive impact on gender inclusivity in organizations. A recent study conducted reveals that VBR (value-based recruiting) could now be the top of the agenda, especially when it comes to promoting DEI in organizations (Sriganthan,2023). Another study (Mccaughan et.al. 2022) states that locally developed and well led approaches for assessing values that are systematically evaluated and well-designed will support relevant, transparent, and standardized recruitment approaches that are adopted by staff across the organization that minimizes interviewer unconscious bias and subjectivity when assessing candidates to promote equal opportunity for candidates. The findings of these studies corroborate the findings in this study which also state that, culture fitment-based hiring that focuses on the value-based hiring philosophy seem to be having a positive influence on the gender inclusivity in the organization. Case A and Case C which focuses on a value based hiring strategy (more than competencies and equally with competencies, respectively) has low and minimal female attrition rates and high gender inclusivity.

Functional fitment based hiring philosophy and gender inclusion

Continued use of job descriptions overdosed with skills, experiences, academic requirements and competencies are anti woman hiring and anti-anyone who is different hiring and can allow biases, emotions, intuitions and subjectivity to rule the hiring decisions (Adler, 2015).

Business strategy (employee centric) and Gender inclusion

The effect of value fit or culture fit on innovation was due to team members identifying more strongly with the team, which led them to be more accepting of the diverse ideas and approaches of the other team member (Judge & Hoffman, 2019). This suggests that when done correctly, culture fit can benefit the business strategy in the organization as it may enhance team identification. This supports the perfect alignment between the culture fitment based hiring strategy and the business strategy in the organizations in this study. The findings from this study seem to suggest that it might be worthwhile or even better to focus/look within the organization (internal stakeholders like employees) while crafting the business philosophy of the organization rather than focusing externally (external stakeholders like customers), as indicated by Case C which reports minimal female attrition and high gender inclusion. This might not only contribute towards better productivity but also seem to contribute towards minimal bias in the organization. Previous studies have also indicated this. According to a recent study, organizations can foster greater feelings of inclusion by providing employee centric programs and policies (Hillary wool et al., 2023). In fact, one of the previous studies state that the more the diversity and inclusion strategy is

linked to the core business strategy, the more effective it will be (Vohra . N & Nair. N 2015; Church & Rotolo, 2013)

Hiring manager perceptions pro women and gender inclusion

Hiring managers and recruiter's perceptions of gender diversity have been shown to influence hiring practices (Hekman et al., 2017; Falkner et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Kohl & Prikladnicki, 2018). Positive perceptions of hiring managers on organizational diversity were found to influence female candidates increasing their interest and comfort even in a minimally diverse field (Kulkarni et al., 2018). The findings of this study also are consistent to these findings of previous studies. Here, in both Case A & Case C, the hiring manager perceptions pro women are very strong and these two organizations report absence of any gender bias and has high inclusivity. In fact, a very recent study (Williams, 2023) has stressed on the need for hiring managers to maintain an inclusive culture where all employees feel that their unique characteristics are valued in furtherance of their collective organizational vision. This study findings also support this. Both Case A and Case C enjoy high inclusivity and the findings of this study suggests that the values based hiring philosophy followed by both organizations is favorable for gender inclusivity.

Senior management support, Organizational interventions and gender inclusion

Significant subthemes associated with gender inclusion are Senior management support and organizational interventions. Previous studies have already suggested that the first step to create an inclusive culture is to raise the awareness and understanding of the managers of the external and internal challenges of a diverse workforce (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Pless & Mach, 2004)

As the findings in this study suggest, the study by Diel and Dzubinski (2016), also states that a lack of self confidence in female candidates/employees has a negative impact on gender inclusivity in organizations. Again, findings from a study conducted by Rivera (2012) which states that, cultural similarities between employers and job candidates matter for employer's hiring decisions, and that personal congruity with the organization's culture or organizational fit is an important consideration for female employees aspiring to move on to senior roles in organizations (Longman et.al, 2018) is also consistent with this study. The findings from this study also aligns with the study by Daya (2014), which stresses on the significance associated with a 'focus on recruitment,' as it is one of the first steps to create an inclusive environment. Few other interesting observations were also made in this study. The study suggests that the absence of any preferential treatment for female candidates or employees seem to be having a positive impact on gender inclusivity in organizations. Again, regarding a family-oriented culture, although occurrence of biases, including gender bias, seem minimal in a family-oriented culture, an overdose of family- oriented culture could at times lead to low engagement levels. This was very subtly mentioned by two of the Group one participants in Case A. The researcher found this interesting and highlights the need to explore it further.

However, certain interesting points observed in this study seem to be inconsistent with the findings of previous studies (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Helgesen & Johnson, 2010; O'Neil et al., 2008) which state that the culture in institutions where structures, systems, environments and traditions are created and sustained primarily by men tends to be defined and understood in terms that define male norms. This study also suggests inconsistencies to a large extent, when it comes to the concept of 'male dominated barriers'

which seem to be associated with previous gender related studies (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Helgerson & Johnson, 2010; Neil et.al 2008). The researcher feels this inconsistency could be due to a 'progressive mind shift' towards female employees which might be happening subtly and over the years. In fact, in this study, despite the fact that the Founder's values is a dominant theme in both Case A and Case C and the values seem to be created primarily by men, the culture is still female friendly and does not seem to be having any 'male dominated barriers'. Literature review (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Ibarra et. al, 2013; Macan & Merrit, 2011; Koenig et.al, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002) suggests that culture dynamics can create challenges for women, biases being one of the most dominant challenges. However, this study indicates that culture dynamics need not always lead to bias in organizations as indicated by Case A and Case Cin this study. Similar is the case with the previous literature on inclusion (Vohra. N & Nair. N, 2018) which considers the role of biases.

To contribute towards developing a culture fitment -based hiring process that could have a positive influence on gender inclusivity in organizations, this study has put forward certain propositions which have been highlighted in the chapter on Cross case analysis. In brief, they suggest that Culture fitment in hiring is a very significant evaluation criterion that can have a positive influence on gender inclusivity in organizations as only certain 'types of cultures' seem to be perpetuating bias/gender bias. The 'type of culture' could be a cause for concern. Hence it is important to identify these elements in the organization's culture and address the issue. It is even more important to define and understand the culture in the organization. For a culture fitment hiring process to be effective, it needs to be well aligned with the founder's values, hiring philosophy, hiring strategy, hiring manager perceptions and senior management's support in the organization. Such culture fitment-based hiring will ensure a positive correlation with gender inclusivity in the organization. Culture fitment hiring with more focus on values (family-oriented culture) and less on functional fitment aspects, seem to have a positive influence on gender inclusion in organizations whereas culture fitment hiring with more focus on the functional fitment aspects (Performance oriented culture) and less on values does not seem favorable for gender inclusivity in organizations. The Business philosophy in each organization seems to be having a very strong impact on gender inclusivity in the organization. It could be better to focus/look within the organization (internal stakeholders like employees) while crafting the business philosophy of the organization rather than focusing externally (external stakeholders like customers). This would not only contribute towards better productivity but will also contribute towards minimal bias in the organization. Again, motivational factors like Senior management support that includes 'employer's respect and confidence level in the female candidate/ employee' has a positive link with culture fitment based hiring and is a very strong organizational element that can contribute positively towards gender inclusivity in organizations.

The researcher below elaborates further on both the research questions:

1. How are culture fitment- based hiring processes shaped in organizations and how do they influence the assessment of women candidates?

As already mentioned in the earlier chapters, the researcher has explored the various organizational elements that play a major role in shaping culture fitment- based hiring processes. All the three organizations studied here follow a hiring process focusing on culture fitment as a major evaluation criterion. Although one of the organizations focus slightly more on functional fitment, culture fitment is also significant to them. Hiring philosophy, founders' values, hiring strategy, leadership style, business strategy, hiring managers perceptions, motivational factors, organizational interventions are all elements

that seem to be influencing the culture fitment-based hiring process in each of these organizations.

In Case A, which has a family-oriented culture, the hiring philosophy is all about hiring individuals who would be able to uphold their core values of integrity, mutual respect, customer centricity, risk mitigation, entrepreneurship and team work. Although the top senior management would be from premier institutes and B-schools, the management believes in leveraging the local community while hiring the middle as well as junior level employees. Referral based hiring and customer kin hiring is followed and this ensures the prevalence of similar values. Their hiring strategy aligns perfectly with their hiring philosophy as they focus on value-based hiring. The hiring managers are open to exploring diverse perspectives of the candidates. As the female attrition rates in this organization is lower than that of males, this indicates that encouraging cognitive diversity in hiring also not only encourages diverse ideas and perspectives, but also helps to reduce bias including gender bias (low female attrition). The hiring manager perceptions also reveal a very positive attitude towards hiring female candidates. They perceive female employees to be more disciplined and systematic and equally capable of handling uncertain or tough situations. For these managers, the most crucial aspect is that the candidate should have a passion for serving the rural community, should have integrity, be trustworthy, possess good communication skills, people management skills and in short, should be a good culture fit. As long as these aspects are ensured, gender and high qualifications seem irrelevant to these hiring managers. The only reason for any apprehension they might have while hiring female candidates is the safety aspect involved in rural travel. However, as long as the candidate is comfortable handling such job profiles, the managers had no issues in hiring them and were more than happy to welcome them in the organization. Thus, their hiring philosophy and strategy is conducive for female employees and candidates. The fact that steps have been initiated to hire more females in the sales department, steps were taken to ensure better infrastructure provisions for female employees all indicate the high level of management support and consideration imparted to the female workers. Above all, once hired, the family culture ensured that the women were treated with utmost respect, and equality is ensured in promotions and other selection processes. The interviews also reveal that once the female employees start working in the organization, they continue for many years unless they have some personal issue due to which they might need to leave. Many of the senior management roles are handled by female employees including the role of current CHRO. The female attrition levels continue to remain low in Case A. Hence, culture fitment hiring does not seem to be having any adverse impacts. In fact, the family oriented culture seems to be acting as a catalyst for hiring more women into the organization.

In Case B, as mentioned earlier, the culture is highly performance oriented. Although culture fitment is a significant criterion in hiring, slightly more focus is given to functional fitment. Their hiring strategy includes a combination of functional and culture fitment. Their founder values clearly reflect their hiring philosophy - 'We chase topline, but not at the cost of profitability', 'We compete fiercely but with prudent risk management', 'We are paranoid about missing opportunities'. If your DNA resonates with this DNA of ours, do reach out to us – are the words of their MD, echoing the sentiments of their hiring philosophy and culture. Here, although the hiring manager perceptions are supportive and pro gender diversity , instances of bias are reported by both group 1 and group 2 participants. Despite the supportive management, these biases including gender bias seem to be happening. The researcher feels that the highly DEI supportive senior management team, especially the initiatives undertaken by their CHRO and his team, is one of the primary reasons that supports and promotes gender inclusivity in the organization despite the biases and fierce competition. The researcher would like to share an interesting excerpt form the interview with the CHRO of the organization, that clearly indicates where the organization stands in terms of diversity and inclusion. In the words of the CHRO - "Currently we are in the stage wherein the seniors have got

their feedback, the 360 degree thing happened, trainings and workshops have been conducted and frameworks have been put in place. I think this is a journey wherein, I wouldn't say we are very mature, in fact we have mapped ourselves on the maturity scale and we still have a long way to go. I am trying to increase the decibel levels of the topic in the company so that awareness will increase".

Case C, as mentioned earlier ensures that there is a good balance between both culture fitment and functional fitment in their hiring process. The Founder who himself was a guardian of values in public life, groomed what he considered his 'family' in a unique tradition with a passion for growth and sacrifice for the common interest.Few of the participants have described their culture as being like a 'family', which is conducive for female employees. Their hiring philosophy embraces their mantra - 'human at the core, digital at the fore'They have a gender ratio of 50:50, which itself speaks volumes of their attitude and approach towards female candidates and employees. The interviews reveal the absence of any bias, including gender bias. As excerpts from the interviews reveal in the earlier chapter, this is supported by both the group 1 and group 2 participants. Also their female employee attrition rates are minimal – 2%. This also highlights the strong senior management support and highly conducive work environment for the female candidates and employees. The hiring managers perceptions clearly indicate that they follow a policy where whoever is good would get a chance. In fact, one of the senior hiring managers has also mentioned that in their organization if women do not come up in a certain role or hesitate to take up any role, it is only because of their own lack of confidence. These words suggest that the culture in the organization is a very strong female friendly culture, upholding values as well as competency. All this indicates that culture fitment-based hiring in Case C has only had a positive influence on their assessments.

Research question 2:

How does culture fitment based hiring impact women candidate's experiences and shape gender inclusivity in organizations

In Case A, the family oriented culture seems to be highly beneficial for female employees and candidates. Other than the standard basic competencies required for each department, the hiring philosophy and hiring strategy embraces values like good communication skills, integrity, collaboration skills, empathy, interpersonal skills, respect and commitment towards work-all which seem to be in favor of female candidates. Besides, the perceptions of the hiring managers are also very much pro female candidates. This is evident from their views on female employees shared with the researcher where they seem to think of female employees as a valuable asset to the organization, 'responsible for sustaining good culture and discipline' as well as possessing multi- tasking abilities. Their only apprehension in hiring female candidates for certain roles that involved travel, especially travel in rural areas, hovered around the safety aspect. Despite the concern, they seem more than happy to hire female candidate for such travel related roles also, if the female candidate is willing to take up such roles. In fact, one of the female employee interviewed shared her thoughts which the researcher found very interesting and inspiring. Even before applying /joining the organization, she had done her share of research on the organization and its culture wherein she realizes that the organization not only supports and encourages one to grow within, but also seems to encourage and support talented employees in indulging in other meaningful extracurricular activities. She spoke very highly of their culture, referring to it as a 'top down thing highly ingrained in the DNA of the organization. Besides, the researcher feels that the 'family culture' has also helped to create

an atmosphere that reflects security, warmth and reliability- all which seems to be playing a major role in retaining the female employees in the organization. Even the interview processes are described as 'very smooth' and 'comfortable' processes by all the participants where in some of them shared the fact that they felt it more to be a very candid chat than a formal interview where they could freely discuss their thoughts and apprehensions too. The culture also enabled promotion of a variety of employee engagement activities which has helped to further boost the high gender inclusive culture in the organization. Most of the employees, especially the female employees seem to have remained with the organization for many years and many of their senior management personnel were females. Thus, culture fitment hiring has had only positive results in this organization and has also had a positive impact on gender inclusivity.

In Case B, the culture is a combination of performance oriented and family-oriented cultures, wherein the interviews with both group 1 and group 2 participants indicate that more weightage is given to the 'performance' aspect. Their tagline itself speaks volumes of their culture – 'sar uthake jiyo'. They value accomplishments, success, growth, performance….althpugh values are important, its all about numbers. Their hiring strategy is more data driven. Their business strategy not only focuses on customer centricity, but also on agility and technology. So, the researcher feels that somewhere along the line, soft skills like emotional empathy, social grace and other personal attitudes and habits seems to have less significance in their culture. Technical skills, competencies and most importantly a competitive instinct and to a certain extent, a 'not so healthy' craving for success and power has taken over the soft skills subtly and gradually. The researcher feels that this could be a reason for biases happening here, including gender bias. This could probably be one of the major reasons for women getting targeted more as they need to also take breaks for personal reasons like maternity etc. at which point, they might be losing out heavily on the career front. Besides all this, the CHRO himself in an interview that the researcher had, openly states that they still have a long way to go where D&I is concerned.. The researcher feels that despite the high attrition levels as reported, the strong senior management support could be playing a very significant role in the organization being able to experience more or less a 'gender balanced' attrition. Thus, in Case B, culture fitment hiring does not seem to be having a consistent high positive impact. It seems to be leading to occasional issues of bias and inequalities in hiring and promotions. However, this does not seem to have influenced their gender inclusivity levels much. The researcher feels that this could only be due to the strong D&I initiatives and very strong senior management support, spearheaded by their CHRO and his team.

In the case of Case C, the organization has a good balance between family oriented and performance-oriented culture. The researcher feels that an equal focus on soft skills as well as competencies, seems to be working very much in favor of female candidates as well as employees in the organization. In fact, the words of their MD reflect heightened support for the female employees and candidates in the organization. In his words, "Gender diversity is about equal opportunity. Women don't want to be singled out and given special treatment. It's the opposite. They want to be treated as professionals and given every opportunity to shine.". The fact that the Founder himself is an ardent promoter of the concept of 'equal opportunity' is one of the major explanations for the high gender inclusive culture in the organization. Again, their employee centric business philosophy also plays a major role in supporting, promoting and sustaining gender diversity and inclusivity in the organization. Their business philosophy considered a well-trained, well informed and most importantly a 'happy workforce with strong work ethics' to be their biggest asset and this philosophy, the researcher feels, is a major boost for female candidates and employees.

Again, in the words of their CHRO, their attrition rates remain the lowest in the industry and this could be because of their culture conditions, work life balance, work culture, communication and connect, high learning opportunities provided, their values framework (CARES) and more importantly keeping these values close to their hearts. He also spoke of how important 'equal opportunities' are and remarked that there will very soon be a time when female employees in the organization can even outnumber the male employees, as the female employee numbers are fast rising. He stressed on the need for 'high performance' also in the organization and mentioned the absence of any preferential treatment for female candidates or employees in the organization. In fact, according to him, 90% of the branches have women in very large numbers and they seem to be performing better than the male employees. In fact, here the researcher would like to highlight the fact that all the participants of Group 1 were highly supportive of female candidates and employees. Their thoughts and sentiments reflect their Founder's values.All the participants of Group 2 also spoke very highly of the culture in the organization and indicated through their words the absence of any bias. The researcher through all the interactions with CASE C employees and management, could sense a very high level of confidence and respect they seem to be having towards their female employees. In fact, if any female candidate is rejected for any role, it could only be because the candidate lacked confidence in herself. One of the senior Group 1 participant, a female HR personnel who had undergone several promotions also shared similar thoughts with the researcher. Thus, this culture which reflects a good balance between values and performance, clearly seems to be working in favor of gender diversity and inclusion in the organization.

Limitations of the study

- Geographical scope: The study's applicability is confined to the Indian context, potentially limiting the generalization of the findings to a broader international or cross- cultural context. Variations in the organizational cultures and practices across different countries may impact the external validity of the study's conclusions.
- Gender centric perspective – The examination of inclusion is predominantly focused on the gender perspective, overlooking the other dimensions of diversity like ethnicity, age etc. A more comprehensive analysis of the various aspects of diversity could provide a more nuanced understanding of inclusion dynamics within organizations.
- Industry specific focus: The study's focus is limited to the BFSI sector. While such a focus paves the way for in-depth insights into a specific industry, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to the other sectors with distinct organizational cultures and hiring practices.
- Neglect of subcultures – The existence of subcultures in the organizations has been overlooked in this study. This might have oversimplified the complexities of inclusion dynamics in the organizations.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

9.1 Summary of findings

As explained earlier, the initial small study that was conducted as well as the extensive literature review that followed led to the two critical research questions which were: 1) How are culture fitment based hiring processes shaped in organisations and how do they influence the assessment of women candidates? and 2) How does culture fitment based hiring impact women candidates' experiences and shape gender inclusivity in organisations? The main purpose of the study was to explore and understanding how culture fitment based hiring processes unfold in organizations, how it shapes gender inclusion and also to explore and understand how managers conceptualize culture fit as well as the role of culture in hiring processes.

To further explore these questions, the researcher chose to conduct the study on three BFSI organizations (Case A, Case B and Case C), which were all organizations listed in the GPTW survey list of 2021. Again, the BFSI sector was chosen as it was one of the sectors that had topped the GPTW list and also is a sector with high diversity hiring ratio (CNBC 2020). Besides, this sector has multiple generations, all under the same roof, which would also contribute to multiple perspectives. Semi structured interviews were conducted on 12 participants form each organization, including Middle and Senior management HR personnel as well as female employees of the organization, which revealed very interesting insights. These insights were further supported by the observations made by the researcher during the site visits as well as the by the data from the company documents and articles collected on these organizations during the study. Thus, data triangulation was ensured. Besides, during the various crucial stages of the study, the insights arrived at during each stage, as well as the final findings were shared with senior HR professionals in each of the organization and validated by them.

The findings, the researcher feels would offer valuable insights for developing a culture fitment based hiring process that could enhance the gender inclusivity in an organisation. A summary of the findings has been highlighted in this chapter. The study reveals that Culture fitment is a crucial criterion in hiring that can have a positive impact on gender inclusivity in an organization. It is important to note here that as certain types of cultures perpetuate bias, it is crucial to consider the 'type of culture' also while indulging in culture fitment based hiring. The study suggests that a successful culture fitment based hiring process would be aligned with organizational elements such as founders' values, hiring philosophy, hiring strategy, business strategy, leadership style and senior management support. Two of the organizations studied had a family- oriented culture, the study of which also revealed that hiring processes emphasising values (family oriented cultures), positively impact gender inclusivity. Conversely, those focusing more on functional fitment (performance-oriented cultures) and less on values may not be favourable for gender inclusivity as they can perpetuate bias, including gender bias. However, strong senior management support, especially favouring Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, could go a long way in controlling the situation and ensuring at least a gender balanced attrition. The study underscores the importance of aligning culture fitment- based hiring processes with the organizational elements, recognising the impact of culture on gender inclusivity and emphasizing values in the hiring approach to foster a more inclusive workplace.

According to this study, business philosophy followed in each organization also has a significant impact

on the gender inclusivity in the organization. Crafting the business philosophy with a focus on internal stakeholders (in this case, employees), rather than external ones (customers), can contribute to better productivity and minimal bias. In this study here, Case C which embraces an employee centric business philosophy enjoys the benefits of minimal or negligible employee attrition. Again, senior management support marked by respect and confidence in female candidates and employees, is a strong organizational element that is positively linked to culture fitment hiring and contributes to enhance gender inclusivity in an organization. In this study, although all three organizations enjoy the benefits of strong senior management support, in Case A, along with respect, there is also a certain level of sensitivity and consideration towards female candidates, especially when it comes to rural travel. Their female employee attrition levels is lower than male employees. In Case B, it is only because of the strong senor management support and CHRO initiatives on the D&I front, that they manage to have a gender balanced attrition, despite the biases. However, in Case C, level of equality in terms of outlook, approach and attitude of the senior management towards the female work force is absolutely devoid of any preferential treatment and they evaluate a candidate purely on the basis of his/her capabilities, giving equal importance to values as well. Case C enjoys minimal or negligible attrition. The study challenges the gendered definitions of previous studies suggesting strongly that cultures shaped by male founders need not be inherently defined by make norms. The researcher through this work also challenges the notion that such cultures (male founders) create challenges exclusively for women in organizations. In fact, Case C which enjoys minimal attrition levels indicates that the absence of any preferential treatment for female candidates/employees has a positive impact on gender inclusivity in an organization. Again, the study also suggests that culture fitment hiring that is based on a combination of value congruence and cognitive diversity supports bias reduction in hiring.

In all the three organizations (Case A, Case B and Case C), where culture fitment is a major criterion in hiring, there are varying outcomes regarding gender bias and female attrition. Case A and Case C showcase a positive scenario with no reported gender bias and low and minimal female attrition rates. In contrast, Case B reports occasional instances of bias including gender bias. However, the presence of a robust senior management, particularly the CHRO and the D&I initiatives effectively maintain a gender balanced attrition. This underscores the idea that, despite conflicting perspectives on culture fitment as an evaluation criterion, indicating that cuture fitment does not perpetuate any gender bias, especially when accompanied by strong leadership commitment. In fact, the study indicates that the biases reported in Case B were in fact a consequence of the high performance oriented culture that was there in the organization. Again, as explained in the earlier chapter on Cross case analysis, this in indicative of the fact that the ‘type of culture’ and not ‘culture fitment’ need to be the cause for concern.

9.2 Implications of the study

Managerial implications:

- Diversification opportunities and inclusivity – A thorough understanding of the role of culture fitment in hiring processes empowers organizations to strategically diversify their workforce. By recognizing and valuing diverse cultural perspectives, managers can not only provide equal opportunities for candidates from traditionally underrepresented groups and contribute towards a

more varied and dynamic workforce, but also, would be able to ensure or enhance gender inclusivity in organizations.

- Positive influence on inclusion – Managers, once they have a clear understanding of the impact of culture fitment, they can proactively shape or influence inclusion in their organization in a positive and more importantly, in a culture sensitive manner. This would involve fostering an inclusive culture that would appreciate differences and at the same time ensure that the hiring decisions are aligned to the various organizational elements that have been mentioned in this study like founders values, hiring philosophy, hiring business strategy, leadership styles and senior management support, promoting a sense of belonging among the employees.

For Academicians:

- Contributions to research – The study enriches the existing body of research by providing a comprehensive view of the interplay between culture fitment and gender inclusion in organizations. It provides valuable insights to academics, especially when it comes to topics around organizational culture and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, providing a nuanced understanding on how culture fitment influences hiring practices and shapes the organizational dynamics.
- Insights for practice development – The insights from the study can provide practical insights to Academicians for developing practices that harness the positive aspects of organizational culture. This could include recommendations for aligning their culture fitment hiring processes to the organizational elements (founders values, hiring philosophy, business strategy, leadership style, senior management support..) and also critically evaluating the culture in the organization. Thus, the cultural strengths can be leveraged to enhance gender inclusivity in the organization. Such practical insights would help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, also helping organizations to implement evidence- based interventions.
- Facilitating organizational interventions – The findings of this study can provide guidance to academicians to advocate for organizational interventions aimed at developing more effective culture fitment based hiring practices. This could be in the form of proposing frameworks, guidelines for training programs that assist organizations to optimize their culture fit assessments, thus contributing towards a gender inclusive organization.
- Enhancing gender inclusion – By understanding how the dynamics of culture fitment in hiring can influence the gender dynamics in an organization, academicians can guide the development of strategies that would actively promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Thus this study could contribute towards fostering a gender inclusive organization.

In short, the managerial implications emphasize the practical application of this study's findings in organizational contexts while academic implications highlight the

contributions to theoretical frameworks as well as the potential to guide future research and interventions. Together these implications enable organizations to foster gender inclusive cultures through the informed hiring practices.

9.3 Recommendations for future research

The applicability of the study's findings can be explored in an international or a cross cultural context. Thus, the variations in the organizational cultures and practices across different countries can be investigated to enhance the external validity of this study's conclusions. This in turn could provide a more comprehensive understanding of culture fitment and inclusion dynamics in a global sense. Inclusion can be examined beyond the gender centric perspective, examining how culture fitment hiring could influence different facets of diversity and inclusion in an organization. The culture fitment and inclusion dynamics could be explored in other industries too with different organizational cultures and hiring practices. How culture fitment and inclusion dynamics would vary across subculture in organizations could also be explored in future. Again, longitudinal studies could be conducted to capture any change in the organizational culture and organizational practices over time. Thus, scholars can contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of culture fitment and inclusion dynamics by considering the diverse cultural, demographic and temporal factors.

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Appendix 1

Case Study Protocol Matrix

Research Questions & Research Objectives	Areas of exploration	Sources of data collection	Respondent details
RQ 1: How are culture fitment based hiring processes shaped in organizations and how do they influence the assessment of women candidates ? RO: To explore the various organizational elements that shape culture fitment based hiring processes and their role in assessing women candidates	Hiring Philosophy, Mission, Values, Founder values and preferences, Hiring manager's dominant style, leadership styles, Industry demands, Motivational factors, Accomplishments of candidates/employees, career growth, Expectations, Perceptions of managers, Goal alignment, Level of work satisfaction, Strategic thinking, Team building and motivation	Primary : Indepth & semi structured interviews Secondary: Company documents, reports, observation	**Group1:** HR personnel, Hiring Panel members **Group2:** Women employees who have been hired recently, Women employees who have undergone promotion interviews in the organization
RQ 2: How does culture fitment based hiring impact women candidates experiences and shape gender inclusivity in organizations? RO: To study the experiences of women employees who have undergone and experienced selection procedures in the organization and to explore how these practices influence gender inclusivity in organizations	Level of collaboration, Feeling of "belonging", Mentorship, Individual development, Teamwork, Women empowerment, Networking, Productivity level, Commitment level in promoting D&I, Grievance redressal systems, Awareness programmes, Perception gaps, Diversity slates for hiring and promotions, Diversity MIS at all three levels,	Primary : Indepth & semi structured interviews Secondary: Company documents, reports, observation	**Group 2:** Women employees who have been hired recently, Women employees who have undergone promotion interviews in the organization

Appendix 2

COREQ (Consolidated criteria for Reporting Qualitative research) Checklist

A checklist of items that should be included in reports of qualitative research. You must report the page number in your manuscript where you consider each of the items listed in this checklist. If you have not included this information, either revise your manuscript accordingly before submitting or note N/A.

Topic	Item No.	Guide Questions/Description	Reported on Page No.
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity			
Personal characteristics			
Interviewer/facilitator	1	Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?	
Credentials	2	What were the researcher's credentials? E.g. PhD, MD	
Occupation	3	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	
Gender	4	Was the researcher male or female?	
Experience and training	5	What experience or training did the researcher have?	
Relationship with Participants			
Relationship established	6	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	
Participant knowledge of the interviewer	7	What did the participants know about the researcher? e.g. personal goals, reasons for doing the research	
Interviewer characteristics	8	What characteristics were reported about the inter viewer/facilitator? e.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic	
Domain 2: Study design			
Theoretical framework			
Methodological orientation and Theory	9	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis	
Participant selection			
Sampling	10	How were participants selected? e.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball	
Method of approach	11	How were participants approached? e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, Email	
Sample size	12	How many participants were in the study?	
Non-participation	13	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	
Setting			
Setting of data collection	14	Where was the data collected? e.g. home, clinic, workplace	
Presence of non-participants	15	Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?	
Description of sample	16	What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g.	

		demographic data, date	
Data collection			
Interview guide	17	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	
Repeat interviews	18	Were repeat inter views carried out? If yes, how many?	
Audio/visual recording	19	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	
Field notes	20	Were field notes made during and/or after the inter view or focus group?	
Duration	21	What was the duration of the inter views or focus group?	
Data saturation	22	Was data saturation discussed?	
Transcripts returned	23	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or	

Common themes (Case A, B &C) & supporting quotes

Hiring manager perceptions – Absence of any preferential treatment for female candidates/employees

Case A	Case B	Case C
• Senior HR professional - "We are hiring women in all roles…for all designations like field. Collection, credit, system, HR… you call it what not" • HR panel member – "We have women casually handling even the toughest jobs • Senior HR professional – "I am an HR guy and I have women colleagues in my team who travel more and travel better than me! • Senior female HR professional (Grp 2)– Sometimes handling collections in rural areas can be challenging or being in office with a large male work force has to be culturally okay with them. We cant promise that you will have a lady in office to have lunch with".	• Fresh recruit (Grp 2) – "Its very tough at times…but I was told that your work has to be like 120% at the very beginning itself…my boss's standards are very strict when it comes to deliverables…no excuses at all".	• Senior HR panel member (Grp 2) – "Her expectations were totally different and so we didn't take her. If our female candidates are not flexible enough to move around, we don't take them". • Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "I have never been given any favourable thing because I'm a woman…we have to fight hand in hand with men and prove ourselves here and then you're there". • Fresh recruit (Grp 2) – "Right in the beginning of the interview itself they told us that they cant guarantee any desired location and that we must be free about relocation"

Participative leadership style:
(Employers open to feedback, employee participation in decision making, enhancing employee's sense of ownership of work, collaboration, open communication, high employee engagement….)

Case A	Case B	Case C
• Senior HR professional – "For our leadership team, the standard competencies documented are collaborative, agile and bold. Collaboration with employees is very important here"	• Senior HR panelist – "We recently conducted an E-roundtable, where we connected with all the employees, presenting and briefing what the org is doing for them and ask them how we can improve. We got inputs and have implemented them too."	• Senior HR panel member – "We have a feedback mechanism in the organization. Again, coming to feedback from exit interviews, they are reviewed and action always taken where ever required."
• Senior HR professional – "We will ask candidates if they have read about company and what they feel about it….what are their thoughts on the company's mission…are we really making a difference…things like that. Their opinions matter to us"	• Senior HR panelist - "We have these exit interviews wherein we have very open discussions and at times get such valuable inputs to act on"	• Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "It's a very flat organization with no hierarchy issues. Anyone can approach anyone anytime and management is always open to feedback"
• Senior HR professional (Grp2) – "The mission and vision and all is not just written on the walls here…it is there in us ! We feel so much at home here…and we all feel we've been born and brought up together"	• Senior panel member – The kind of comfort that a candidate would have in interacting with senior members here and putting his/her point across, its just too good here"	• Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "We pick up a lot of corrective acitons based on exits"
• Fresh recruit (Grp2) – "You have the liberty to speak anything in the team and ask anything …there is no barrier like hierarchy"	• Senior manager(Grp 2) - Even HODs are open to open discussions and conversations just like that..over a call"	• Senior HR Manager – During exit interviews , we listen to even their personal stuff, give proper attention and if anything can be done about any issue, we do whatever we can..this also helps us to improve"
		• Fresh recruit (Grp2) – "No lag between I am the officer or he is the regional head …no such gap here, we can discuss freely".

Cognitive diversity
(Different perspectives, backgrounds, educational levels, knowledge, information processing styles, skills)

Case A	Case B	Case C
• Senior HR panel member – "I have got a person who discontinued his engineering …I did conduct his interview thinking he could join collections" • Senior HR panel member – "There are different kinds of people we hire..like there is this ex-military guy. their values would be inclined to ours, integrity is paramount and his work is undoubted and even more responsible than any guy we've hired from the same industry". • Senior HR panel member – "I want ot hire a guy in admin deptwho can handle important works, collaborate and get things done judiciously, I look at some guys who are ex-military, ex-army, ex-nave or ex-airforce…they manage very well". • Manager (Grp2) – "I have seen candidates from different backgrounds – education, industry..we take	• Senior HR professional – "Lets try to look from other industries and even outside of BFSI, who can bring these skillsets the particular role requires…like negotiating skills, selling skills, data orientation, customer orientation and matches our epic values". Senior HR panel member - "We also look at industry diversity, which means not everybody need to necessarily come from insurance sector. Ware open to large no of talent – including non BFSI".	• Senior HR panel member (female) – "We are not so particular on domain expertise always as that can be built up later also, but the right attitude, mindset and willingness to put in effort are very important" • HR Manager - "Never in my wildest dream did I think I would end up in HR because I'm basically a CS engineer…but I feel they help you really find your niche area ! I worked in different branches and now I'm here" • Marketing Manager (Grp 2) – "I am from Civil engineering background, but now in Marketing here! This is totally new for me, but I am learning and enjoying my work".

them basis their capabilities, experience and if they don't fit here, we try out for some other dept.		

Minor culture fitment challenges

Case A	Case B	Case C
• Senior HR professional – "Sometimes the candidate says they are ok to travel and all that…but, then they get tired quickly…that is there …what they say and what they do!" • Senior HR team member – Sometimes you hire through a reference, thinking that value systems would be more or less same…but then, rarely, that might not be the case	• Senior HR professional – "Sometimes the candidate responses can be very impulsive and may not really identify completely with the real stuff which might lead to issues later on" • Senior manager (female) – "Sometimes, to get enough people who are a fit and also have experience and have handled scale…can be little challenging.."	• Senior HR hiring panel member (female) – "New gen has this thing for instant gratification which is one cultural challenge we face..they talk of big big things, but not willing to take pain and effort and leave it on the way" Senior HR panel member (female) – "All other ways they might fit, but whether they are flexible to move around …and also, sometimes to find really service minded people..is at times difficult".